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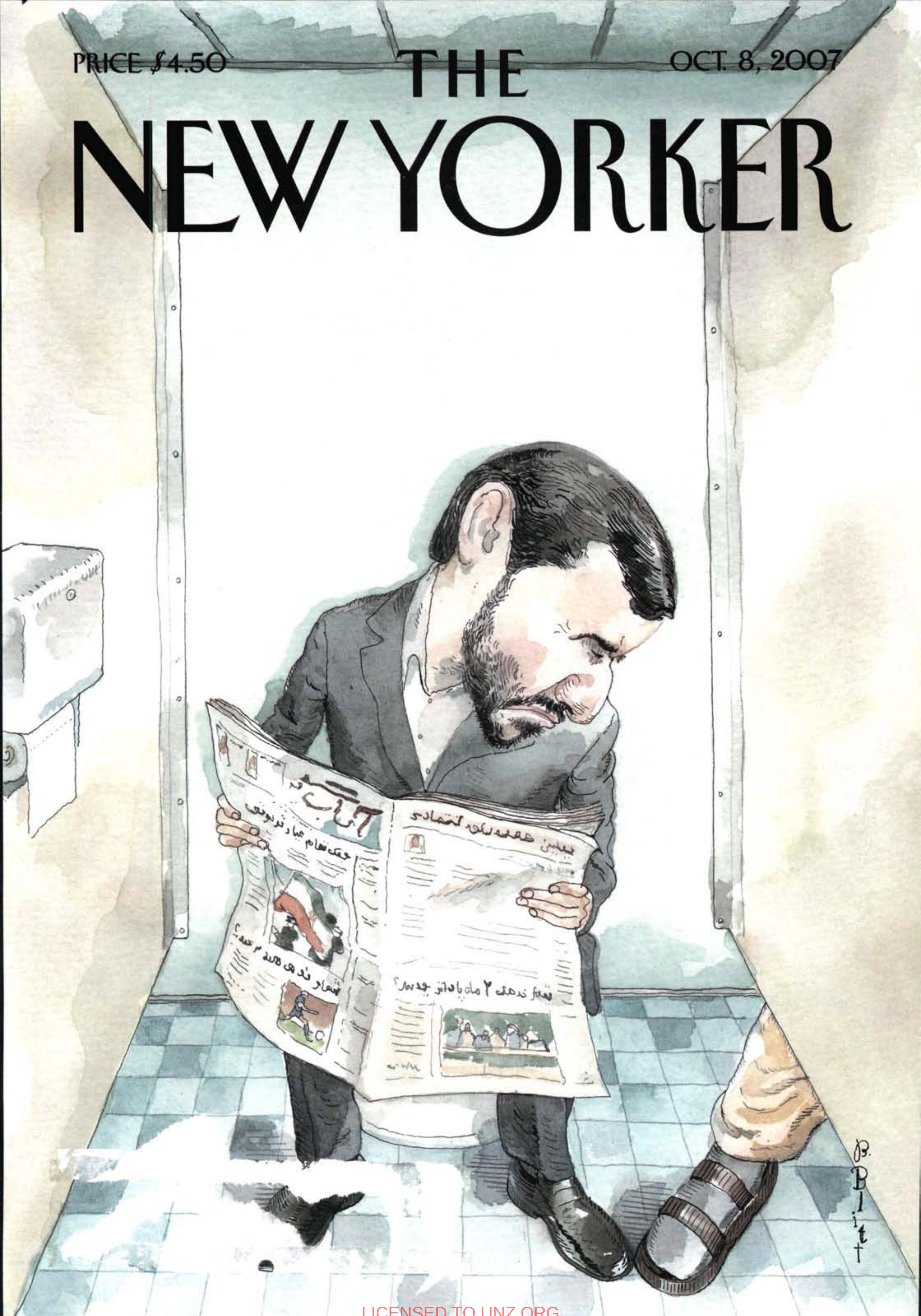

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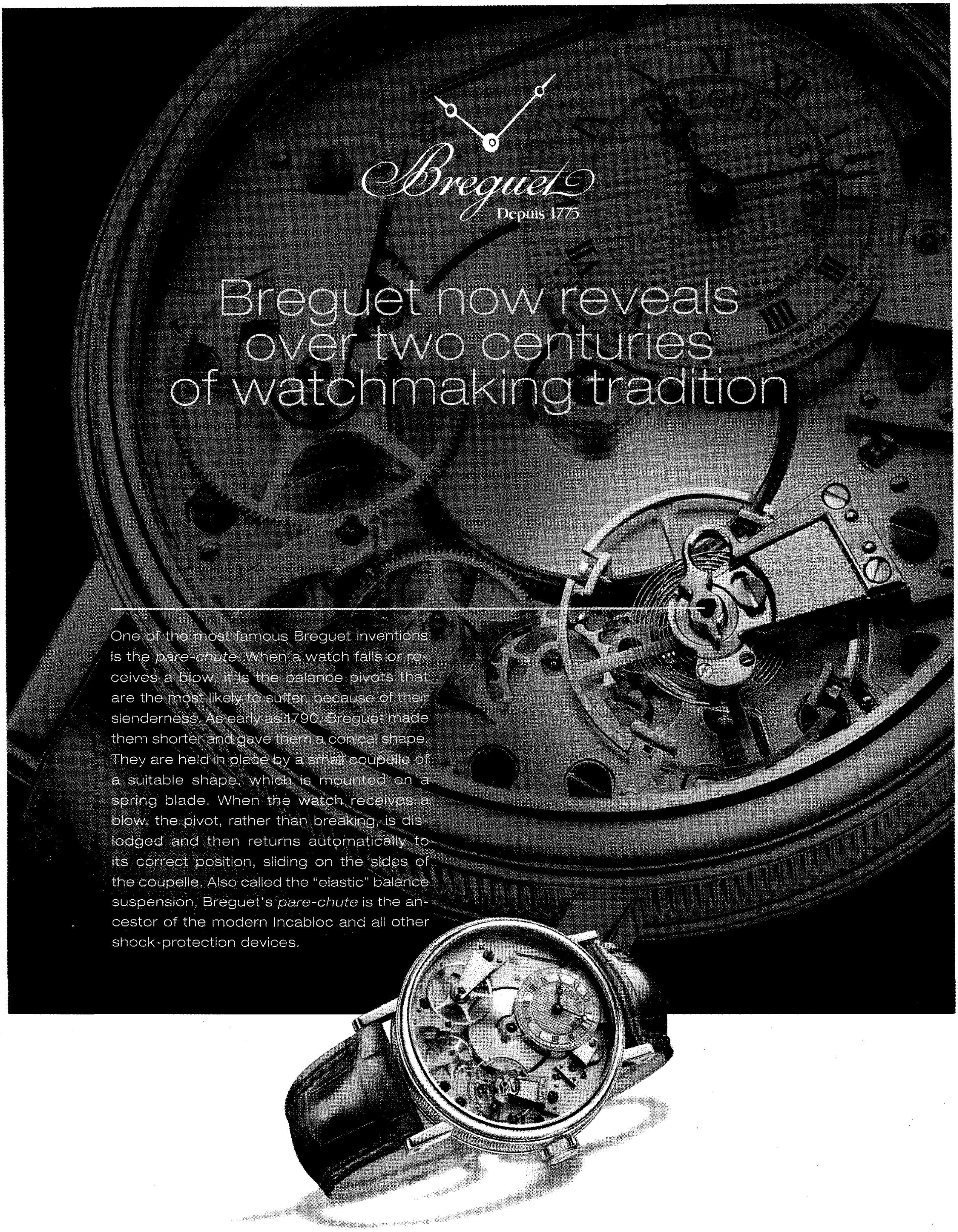

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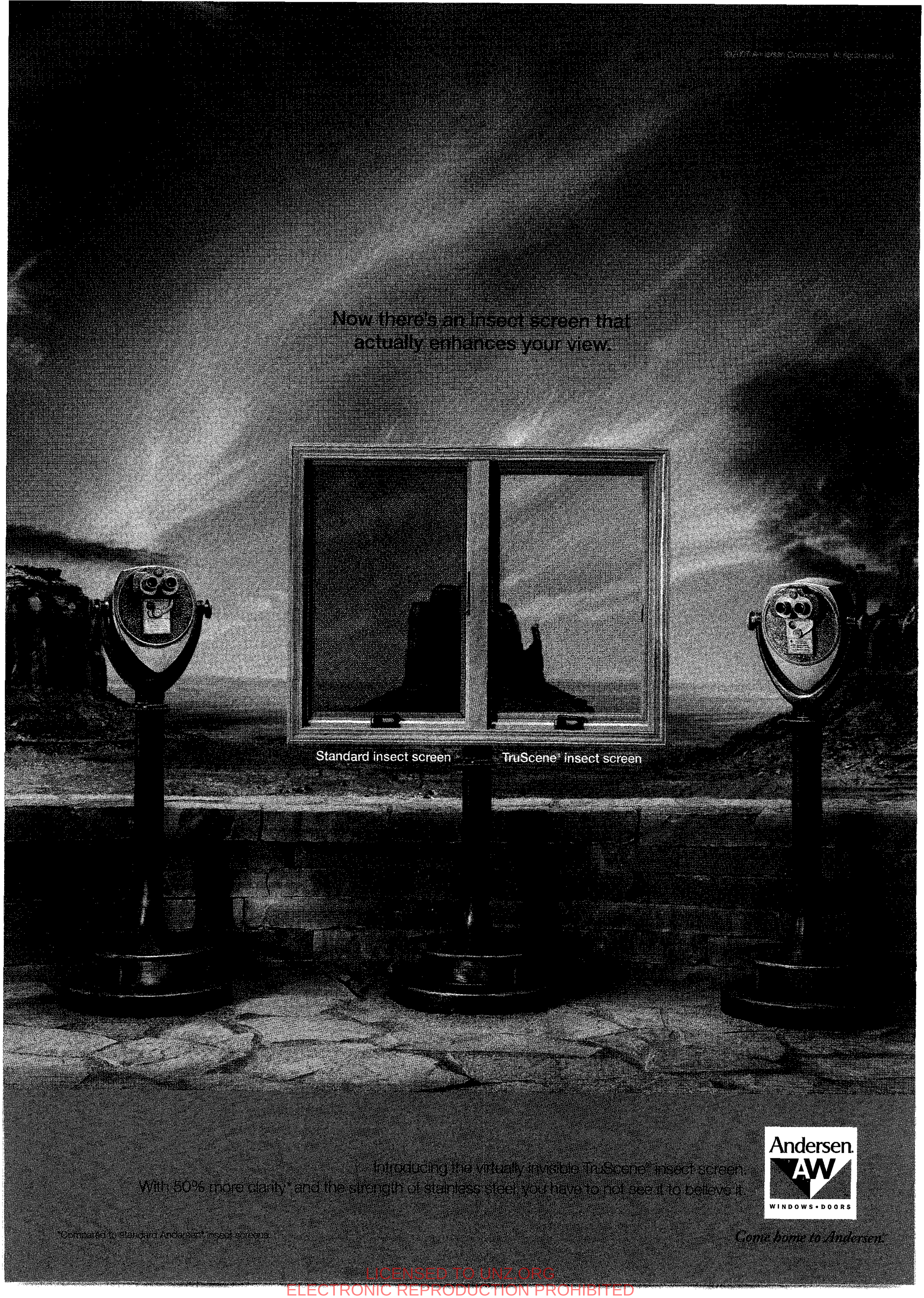
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Seymour M. Hersh ("Shifting Targets," p. 40) has been contributing to the magazine since 1971. He is the author of eight books, including "Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib."

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Tessa Hadley (Fiction, p. 80) published "The Master Bedroom," her third novel, and "Sunstroke," a book of short stories, this summer.

Joan Acocella (Books, p. 88) reviews books and dance for the magazine. "Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints," a collection of essays, is her most recent book.

Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 98) is the magazine's art critic.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

The New Yorker Out Loud: *Alex Ross* talks about his new book and his blog, both named "The Rest Is Noise." / A slide show of work by the artist Kara Walker. / *George Packer's* Interesting Times, *Dana Goodyear's* Postcard from Los Angeles, and a blog by *Hendrik Hertzberg.* / From the archives: *Seymour M. Hersh* on the Bush Administration and Iran, *Janet Flanner* on Rudolf Nureyev, and portraits by the illustrator *Richard Merkin.* / Hundreds of Tables for Two restaurant reviews, going back to 2001. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events across the country.

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on the town

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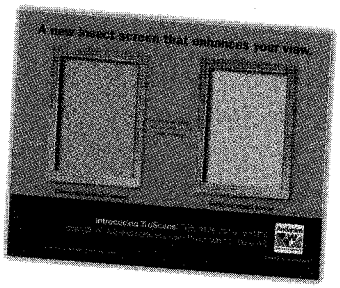

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REMEMBERING PROUST

Oliver Sacks, in his fascinating story on the English musician Clive Wearing, who suffers from a debilitating type of amnesia, writes that Wearing's wife, Deborah, in a film about her husband, "quoted Proust's description of Swann waking from a deep sleep, not knowing at first where he was, who he was, what he was. He had only 'the most rudimentary sense of existence, such as may lurk and flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness,' until memory came back to him, 'like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped by myself'" ("The Abyss," September 24th). Actually, this episode, appearing in the very first pages of "Swann's Way," concerns not Swann but Marcel, who is the narrator and protagonist of all the volumes of "Remembrance of Things Past" (or "In Search of Lost Time," depending on which translation one prefers). Nor does it turn out, as one goes on reading, that memory alone is needed to save Marcel from permanent disorientation. What is also required is the not so obviously authoritative resource of custom—sheer force of habit— since the "shifting and confused gusts of memory never lasted for more than a few seconds." By the end of almost any extended wandering rumination in Proust, more questions have been raised than answers given.

Robert Ganz
Chilmark, Mass.

A STYLE OF ONE'S OWN

Mark Singer, in his exploration of how William Barrington-Coupe passed off as the recordings of his wife, the pianist Joyce Hatto, performances by other musicians, writes that Barrington-Coupe claimed he spliced into her recordings patches of performances by other pianists with similar styles ("Fantasia for Piano," September 17th). "My wife was completely unaware that I did this," Barrington-Coupe says. "I simply let her hear . . . the finished editing that she thought was completely her own work." This strikes me as unbelievable, and downright impossible if the pianists played at such different levels, as reported of Hatto and her substitutes. If Joyce Hatto had been an actress into whose audio recording of Ophelia her husband had spliced renditions of other actresses with "similar styles," no one would believe that she could remain unaware of it. Difference in actresses' voices would be a strong clue in that case, but pianists, too, have their own "voices."

James Boyk
Los Angeles, Calif.

PLAIN AS CAN BE

Adam Kirsch, in his review of "Being Shelley," writes that Robert Browning's line "And did you once see Shelley plain?" is famous because no one ever has (Books, August 27th). Browning, though, was being quite literal. He wrote that line because he overheard a customer in a bookshop telling the proprietor that he had passed Shelley in the street. Browning, who held Shelley in awe, asked the man if he had indeed seen Shelley "plain"—in other words, in actual life, going about his business. Alan Bennett, the English author and actor, describes in his memoir "Writing Home" how the phrase "Shelley plain" was used in his social circle as a kind of literary shorthand to describe an incident in which one encountered a famous movie star or director backstage or at a party. "That Elizabeth Taylor once sat on my knee," Bennett wrote in another memoir, "Untold Stories," "is what in the Edwardian slang of the Baring family would have been called a 'Shelley plain.'"

Howard Goodkind
Litchfield, Conn.

•

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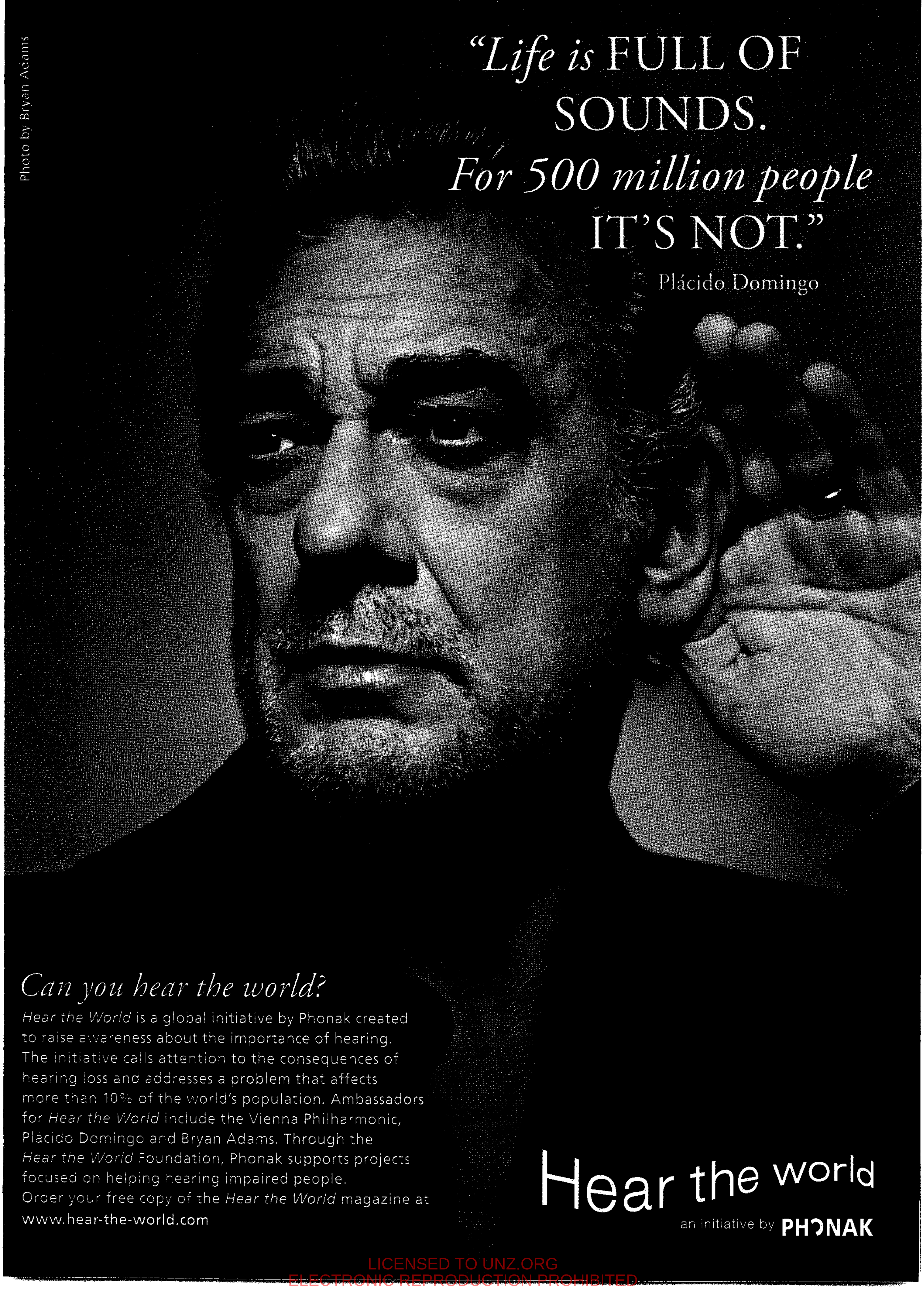

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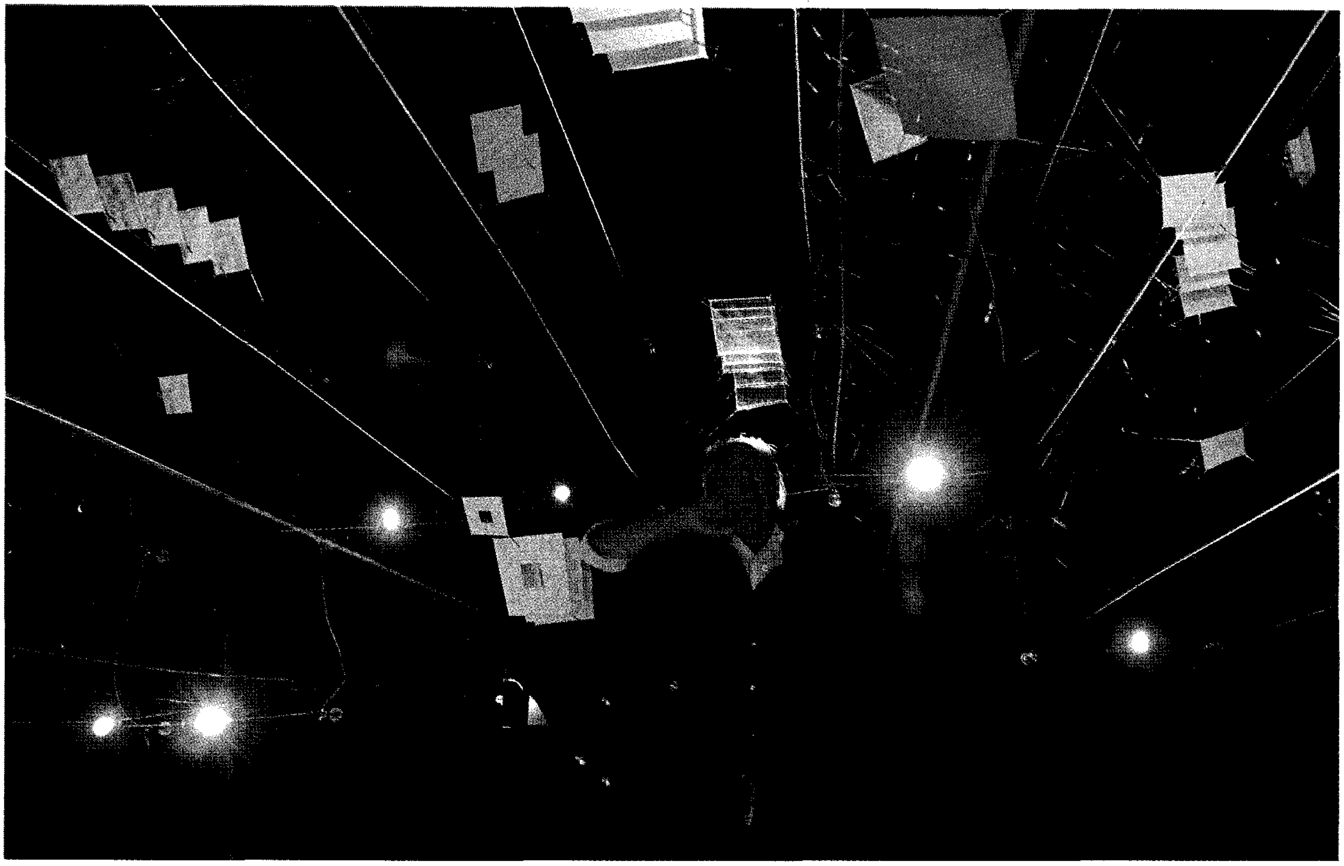

An exhibit of the lighting design of Ingo Maurer, at the Cooper-Hewitt. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE

ALL THAT LIVES

The Public Theatre opens its season with the Wooster Group's take on "Hamlet." Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte, the troupe deconstructs the tragedy, incorporating filmed footage of Richard Burton's 1964 Broadway performance as the prince. Scott Shepherd and Kate Valk lead the cast. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE

STILL STANDING

As rare as it is for a rock band to last thirty years, it is even rarer for a punk band, but the Mekons—who came out of the same England that gave the world the Sex Pistols and the Clash—are entering their fourth decade. The Leeds ensemble has endured by never losing its sense of humor and by embracing country and other genres. They celebrate with a show at the Blender Theatre at Gramercy. (See page 12.)

ART

HAPPY VALLEY

Today, the Kashmir Valley prompts thoughts of Indian-Pakistani conflict—or the ubiquitous pashmina shawl. But for centuries it flourished as the crossroads of Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim cultures. The Asia Society opens "The Arts of Kashmir" with more than a hundred objects dating from the second century to the twentieth. (See page 15.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

SWISS ACCOUNTS

After Claudio Abbado's cancellation, David Robertson and Pierre Boulez have swept in to save Carnegie Hall's bacon, conducting the superb Lucerne Festival Orchestra in works by Mahler and Beethoven during the hall's opening-week festivities. (See page 21.)

MOVIES

CELEBRATE HANEKE

Violence, lust, deception, and guilt are among the elements with which the German director Michael Haneke has, since 1976, made viewers enjoy feeling bad. MOMA's retrospective features his movies (from "The Seventh Continent" through "Caché") and his many television productions, including adaptations of works by Franz Kafka, Joseph Roth, and Ingeborg Bachmann. (See page 26.)

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HIVES ALIVE

The first time you see that the Hives are touring with Maroon 5, it seems like a misprint. Maroon 5 is an earnest American band that plays catchy white soul, a bit like Hall and Oates with a heavy Stevie Wonder fixation. They are immensely popular—they débuted one of their singles on "American Idol"—but not particularly cool. The Hives are five Swedish guys who wear identical white-and-black suits and play an intensely playful brand of garage rock. At a show in New York several years ago, the singer, Howlin' Pelle Almqvist, climbed up into the balcony, ran through the crowd to the other side of the stage, and then climbed back down. Maroon 5's lead singer, Adam Levine, is better known for dating models and generally stays near his microphone stand. There is no overlap between the two bands, except that they are both sneakily good at what they do. It is hard to imagine that, when the bands play Madison Square Garden on Oct. 10, Maroon 5's fans will accept the Hives' high-concept revivalism, but it will be fascinating to watch it—or something else—happen.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

A BRONX TALE
The Broadway début of the one-man drama written by Chazz Palminteri in 1989, about his childhood in the Bronx. Palminteri stars; Jerry Zaks directs. Previews begin Oct. 4. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CHILDREN OF VONDERLY
Ma-Yi Theatre Company opens its nineteenth season with a new play by Lloyd Suh, about a multiethnic family of adopted and disabled children in Indianapolis. In previews. Opens Oct. 4. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

A FEMININE ENDING
Sarah Treem wrote this drama, directed by Blair Brown, about a recent college graduate with an up-and-coming rock-star boyfriend and a mother on the brink of divorce. Marsha Mason stars. Previews begin Oct. 4. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE GOLDMAN PROJECT
Staci Swedeen wrote this drama, about a Holocaust survivor. Joe Brancato directs. Opens Oct. 3. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

GREETINGS FROM YORKVILLE
A Midwestern songwriting duo arrives in the Big Apple, in this musical by Robert Grusecki. Direction by the late Thommie Walsh; art design by Robert Risko. In previews. Opens Oct. 4. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

HAMLET
The New York première of the Wooster Group's production, directed by Elizabeth LeCompte. Previews begin Oct. 9. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

HOTEL CASSIOPEIA
Anne Bogart directs Charles Mee's play in a SITI Company production, about the life of Joseph Cornell. Opens Oct. 9. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

JUMP
The U.S. début of this Korean show of acrobatics and slapstick, set among a family whose members love to challenge one another to martial-arts showdowns. In previews. Opens Oct. 7. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-307-4100.)

MARGARET CHO'S THE SENSUOUS WOMAN
The comedian hosts a burlesque-inspired variety show in celebration of women's bodies. In previews. Opens Oct. 6. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-352-3101.)

MAURITIUS
Alison Pill, F. Murray Abraham, Dylan Baker, Katie Finneran, and Bobby Cannavale star in Manhattan Theatre Club's production of a drama by Theresa Rebeck, about half sisters who inherit a stamp collection. Doug Hughes directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 4. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

MINIMUM WAGE
An a-cappella musical about the employees of a fast-food burger joint, written by Sean Altman and Charlie and Jeff LaGreca. Guy Stroman directs. In previews. (The Green Room, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200.)

NONE OF THE ABOVE
Jenny Lyn Bader wrote this play, about getting into Princeton. Julie Kramer directs. In previews. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE OVERWHELMING
Roundabout Theatre Company presents J. T. Rogers's drama, about an American family living in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

PYGMALION
Claire Danes and Jefferson Mays star in Shaw's classic drama, in a Roundabout Theatre Company production. David Grindley directs. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE RITZ
Roundabout Theatre Company revives Terrence McNally's 1975 comedy, starring Rosie Perez and Kevin Chamberlin, in which a heterosexual man hides from a mobster in a gay bathhouse. Joe Mantello directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

SPEECH & DEBATE
Stephen Karam's new play, about a high-school debate team in Oregon, presented by Roundabout Theatre Company. Jason Moore directs. Previews begin Oct. 5. (Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE VEILED MONOLOGUES / IS.MAN
Adelheid Roosen's "Veiled Monologues," which chronicles relationships under Islam, and "Is.Man," which looks at honor killings in Muslim families, run in repertory. Opens Oct. 5. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St. 718-254-8779.)

THE WOLVES IN THE WALLS
National Theatre of Scotland presents this children's story, about a girl who thinks there are wolves living in the walls of her house, created by Vicky Featherstone, Nick Powell, and Julian Crouch ("Shockheaded Peter"). Opens Oct. 5. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

NOW PLAYING

AMERICAN SLIGO
Adam Rapp ("Red Light Winter") once again reaches into the cracked cookie jar of nihilistic male aggression in his new play, about the addled family of an aging pro wrestler, Art (Crazy Train) Sligo (Guy Boyd), on the eve of his retirement match. A sense of jittery unease pervades the play's first half, which unfolds as a blue-collar domestic comedy. But then Victor (the mesmerizing Paul Sparks), Art's violent, coked-up son, takes over, and the play finds its animus. Still, it's never clear whether Victor's unnerving acts of hostility and self-sabotage are the result of sound dramaturgy or of Rapp's impulse to smack his audience around a little. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

THE DINING ROOM
An immaculate dining room functions as a museum of twentieth-century upper-middle-class Wasp mores in A. R. Gurney's episodic ode to a vanishing era of finger bowls and polished silver. Jonathan Silverstein directs the Keen Company's mild revival as a benign comedy of manners, populated by stuffed shirts with names like Binky and Standish, their conflicted children, and a chorus of melancholy, wise domestics. The original conceit's intentional mustiness has grown even staler since the play's début, in 1982, and the chief pleasure here lies in watching the six actors (each of whom plays nine or ten characters) transform themselves cannily from children into grandparents, servants into masters. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

DIVIDING THE ESTATE
Primary Stages presents the New York première of a comedy by Horton Foote, set in the late nineteen-eighties, in which a Texas family contemplates its fate. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

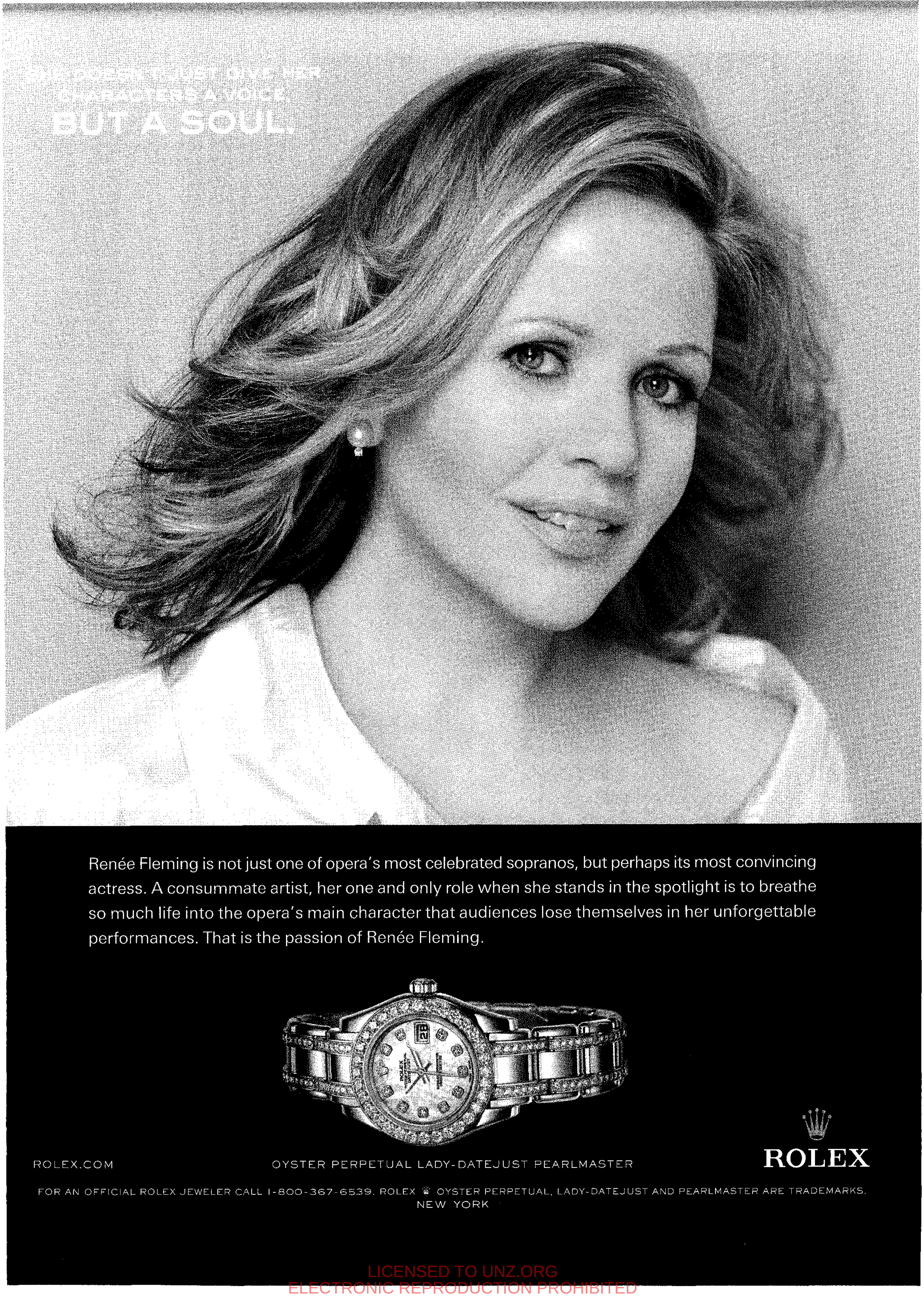
HAMLET
Shepard Sobel directs Shakespeare's tragedy, at the Pearl. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

THE MISANTHROPE
New York Theatre Workshop presents Molière's comedy, directed by Ivo van Hove. (79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

O YES I WILL
Deb Margolin wrote and performs this one-woman show, inspired by a pre-surgery drug-induced monologue she once delivered. (Dixon Place, 258 Bowery, 2nd fl. 212-219-0736, ext. 110. Through Oct. 7.)

THE POWER OF DARKNESS
In Tolstoy's play about the seductive nature of sin, written in 1886 but rarely performed, Nikita (Mark Aldaheff), a farmworker, has an affair with his employer's wife, Anisya (Angela Reed). Nikita's mother encourages Anisya to poison her husband, which she does, and Nikita proceeds to marry her, take control of the inheritance, become a drunkard, and impregnate his

SCOTT VINCENT



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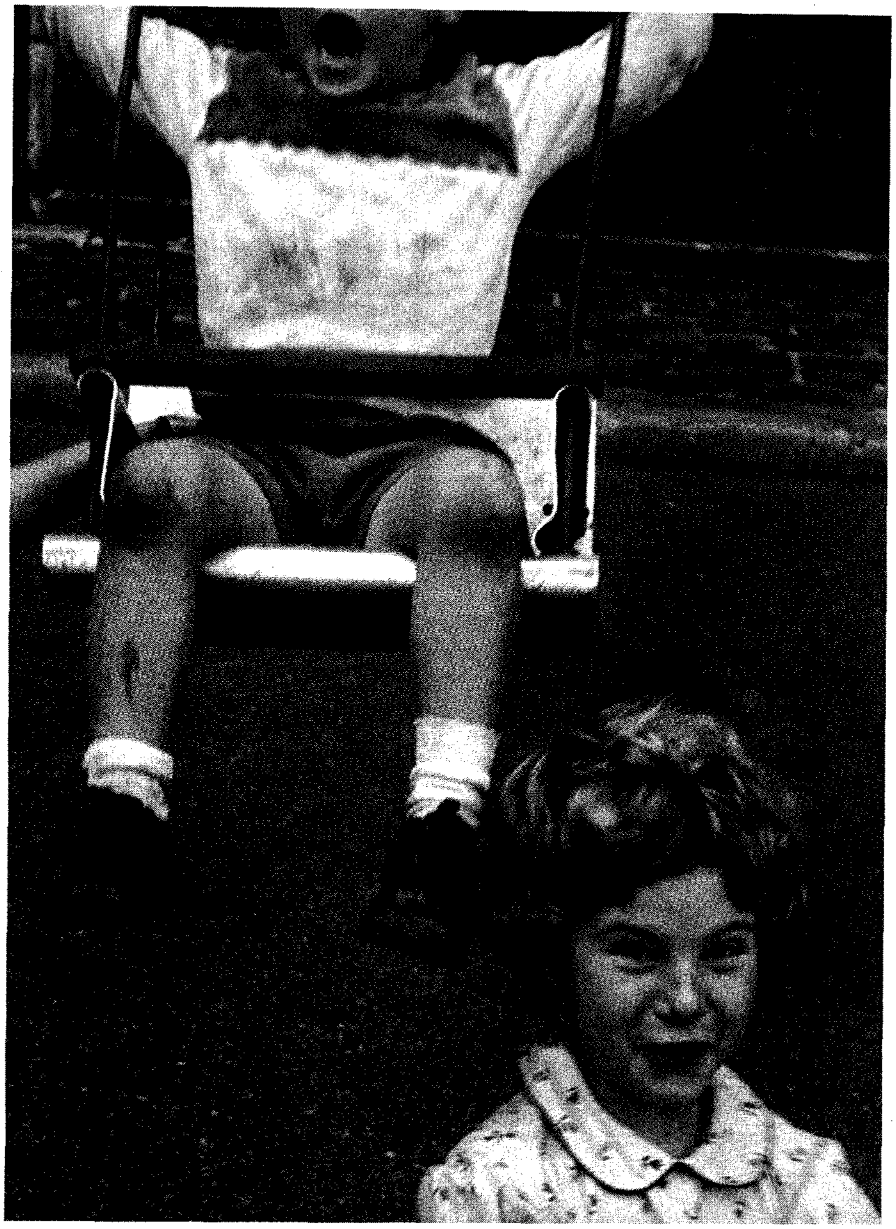


William Klein's photograph, in the show "25 Years: A Celebration," at Greenberg.

stepdaughter. The primary reason for the play's obscurity is probably its excruciating infanticide scene, which is often edited but is faithfully presented here; a secondary reason may be the absence of the subtlety and psychological insight that characterize Tolstoy's novels. Martin Platt's translation and direction only heighten the dramatics. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

ROCK DOVES
Marie Jones wrote and Ian McElhinney directed this drama set in Belfast in the present, more than a decade into the formal ceasefire in Northern Ireland. A drunk (Marty Maguire), a paramilitary wannabe (Johnny Hopkins), an ex-prostitute (Natalie Brown), and a transvestite (Tim Ruddy) find themselves holed up in the same decrepit flat. In a series of actions possible only in a single-set piece like this one, these four marginal characters become central figures in a murderous scenario unfolding outside their rotting walls. The actors are all strong, but Jones's artificial and ultimately sentimental play relies more on the description of motivation and character than on their dramatic revelation. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 212-868-4444.)

SCARCITY
In Lucy Thurber's drama, the thirty-something Martha (Kristen Johnston) is married to the slovenly Herb (Michael T. Weiss), who keeps all his minions—including their prepubescent daughter, Rachel (Meredith Brandt), and their intelligent adolescent son, Billy (Jesse Eisenberg)—at his beck and call. A teacher sees Billy's potential and helps him secure a scholarship to a private school. Thurber—who grew up watching shows like "Roseanne" but is able to peel away the laughs and reveal the ugly lives beneath—makes her mark as an artist by showing us how some parents would rather keep their offspring in their muck than allow them an opportunity for advancement. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/1/07.) (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **EDGE:** ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-352-3101. Through Oct. 6. **GONE MISSING:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IPHIGENIA 2.0:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. Through Oct. 7. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TINGS DEY HAPPEN:** Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

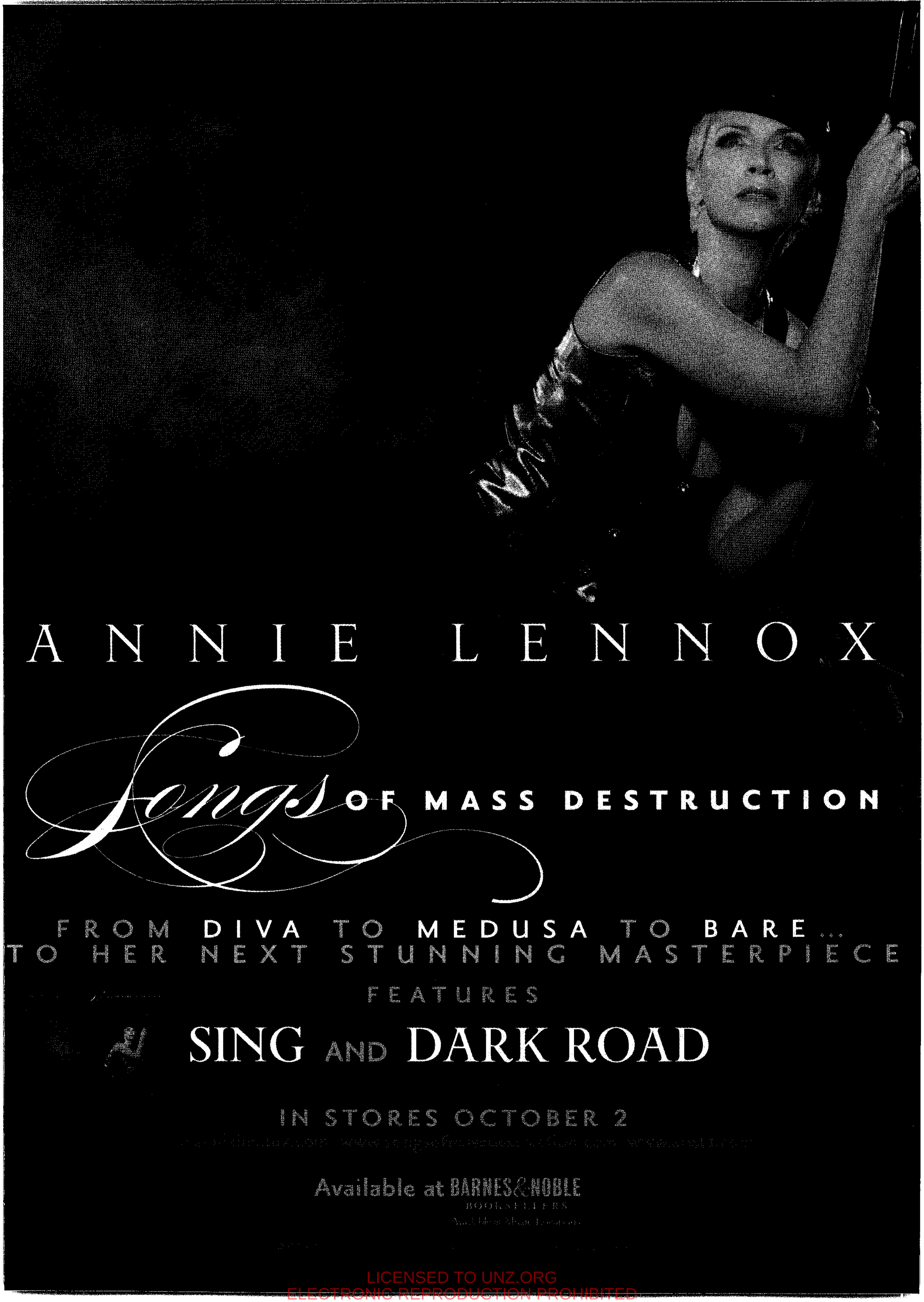
APOLLO THEATRE
253 W. 125th St. (212-531-5300)—Oct. 6: **Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings.** The late-blooming singer Jones—she worked as a corrections officer before turning to music full time, in her early forties—was born in Augusta, Georgia, which is also the birthplace of James Brown. Like the late, great Godfather of Soul, she knows how to command an audience. Jones has put out a series of old-school albums with her backing band, a sharp-dressing horn-heavy ensemble that has become an in-demand session group in its own right (they're the folks who gave Amy Winehouse's hit "Rehab" much of its throwback appeal). Jones's latest release with the group is called "100 Days 100 Nights."

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Oct. 5: **Gods and Monsters,** the rock outlet for the maverick ex-Captain Beefheart guitarist Gary Lucas, helps BAM celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its Next Wave festival. Lucas's ever-shifting ensemble has featured such names as Matthew Sweet and the late Jeff Buckley (Lucas co-wrote his hit "Grace"), and the current incarnation includes the former Television drummer, Billy Ficca, the onetime Modern Lovers bassist, Ernie Brooks, and a horn section. For this special show, the former Talking Heads keyboardist Jerry Harrison sits in with the band.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Mondays this month: **Chicha Libre,** something of a local supergroup, includes the cuatro player and vocalist Olivier Conan (a member of Las Rubias del Norte and also one of the owners of this club), the keyboardist Joshua Camp (of One Ring Zero), the bassist Nicholas Cudahy (formerly of Combustible Edison), and the guitarist Vincent Douglas (of Bébé Eiffel, and another owner of the club). They start with South American *chicha* music (an electrified take on the folkloric genre cumbia that dates back some thirty years) and add psychedelic touches, surf rock, and extended improvisations.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 3: The **Mekons.** Billing their thirtieth-anniversary show "A Quiet Night with the Mekons" handily sums up the band's below-the-radar aesthetic. Though they hail from the same storied era of British punk as the Clash and the Sex Pistols (and though they are long-standing critics' darlings), the Mekons never made a big splash. With a wide catalogue of wry, unpretentious, and endearingly amateurish rock, they've morphed from their crude origins to embrace elements of country-Western, and have built a cult following like few others. Oct. 4: The singer-songwriter **Erin McKeown** is joined by her Little Big Band, a six-piece outfit with a horn section.

BOWERY POETRY CLUB
308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-614-0505)—When **Roy Nathanson** was a child, his father paid him to read books ("five cents a page," according to one of his songs), and the former Lounge Lizard and co-founder of the Jazz Passengers developed a lifelong love of literature (he's also a poet). "Sotto Voce," a project inspired by Italo Calvino's "Invisible Cities" which features stories that feel both familiar and strange, alternates between Nathanson's gruff storytelling voice and his mellifluous sound on alto and soprano sax. On Oct. 8, his fellow-poets Jeff Friedman, Ross Gay, and Judith Vollmer join Nathanson and read their work to the music of the band, which includes the beat-boxer Napoleon Maddox, the bassist and singer Tim Kiah, and fellow Jazz Passengers Curtis Fowlkes, on trombone, and Sam Bardfeld, on violin.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SING AND DARK ROAD
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BOOKSELLERS

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 3-4: The singer-songwriter **Brandi Carlile** has a mean set of pipes and a sterling track record: the home-recording rocker is now a budding major-label star and television-soundtrack artist whose songs have been featured on the prime-time hit "Grey's Anatomy." Oct. 5: Washington's **Melvins** were one of the guiding lights of the grunge era, in the nineties, and had a huge influence on Nirvana. Lately, the Melvins have been collaborating with the band Big Business (which is also performing this evening), and the Melvins' latest album, "(A) Senile Animal," displays a more progressive bent. The band's slow-as-molasses tempos and sternum-cracking volume remain bracing, however, and now that the band has two drummers, the concussive force emanating from the stage might be enough to blow a new part in your hair.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Oct. 6: The highly imaginative ensemble **Hazmat Modine,** which is led by the singer and harmonica player Wade Schuman, and friends. Later that night: The dulcet sounds of **Las Rubias del Norte.**

"LET'S ZYDECO"
The concert series dedicated to the various indigenous musical forms of Louisiana has arranged for a visit by **Nathan & the Zydeco Cha-Chas** on Oct. 7. The accordionist Nathan Williams named his group for a song by the late zydeco monarch Clifton Chenier, but Williams is no nostalgic traditionalist. His band mixes R. & B. influences into its musical stew; its repertoire includes a French version of Stevie Wonder's "Isn't She Lovely." (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597 or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Oct. 9: **High on Fire,** as its name might suggest, traffics in a subgenre known as "stoner metal." The band turns out monstrous guitar rock that makes conventional heavy metal seem tame. Preoccupied with Tolkienesque imagery and the ridiculous magnitude and density of its own sound, High on Fire doesn't shy away from clichés—in fact it embraces them, as demonstrated on its new album, "Death Is the Communion."

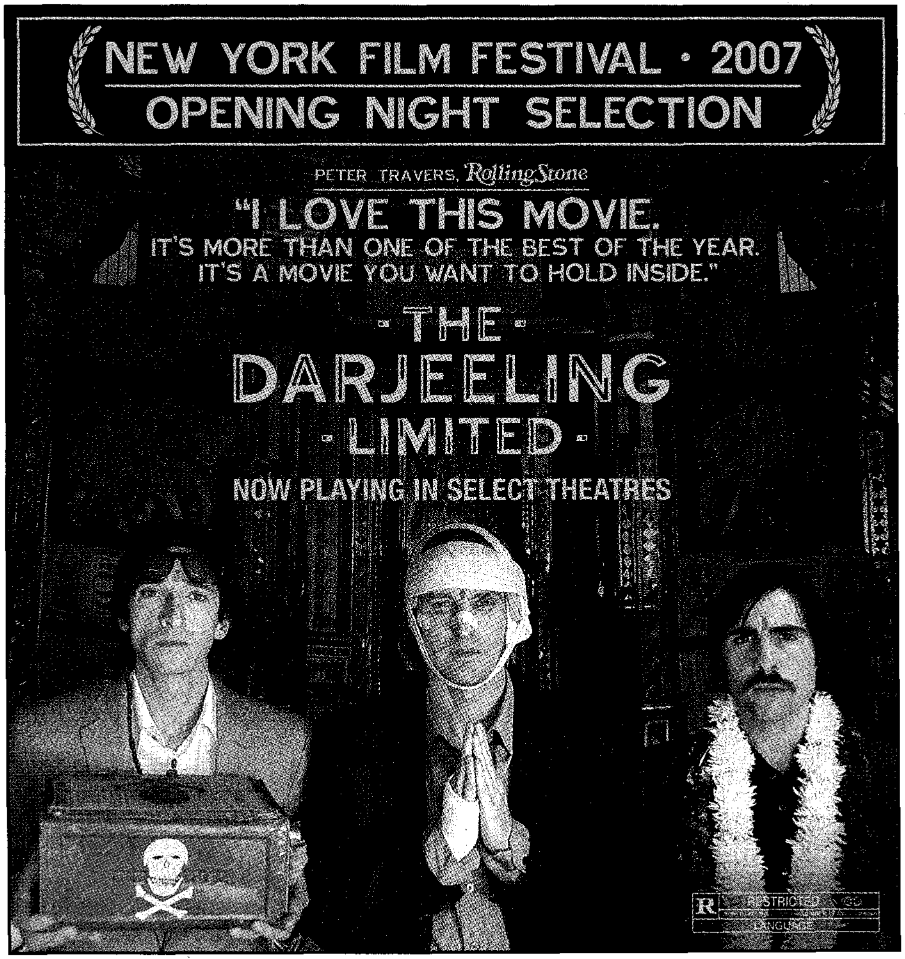
NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 5: A night of intergenerational hip-hop with the **Roots, Big Daddy Kane, MC Lyte,** and others.

RANDALL'S ISLAND
East and Harlem Rivers (212-307-7171)—Oct. 6: The acclaimed Montreal rock-and-roll collective **Arcade Fire** and the allusion-happy popsters **LCD Soundsystem.**

WAMU THEATRE AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 3: Like many of its neo-New Wave contemporaries, London's **Bloc Party** mined its older siblings' post-punk record collections and adopted an angular guitar sound. After being lambasted in the music press for the derivative nature of its jittery funk rhythms and Cold War aesthetics, Bloc Party has started to move beyond its stylized appropriations and is slowly coming into its own.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Oct. 3-6: The octogenarian pianist **Randy Weston** has steeped himself in the music of North Africa, but there's still plenty of Brooklyn bop left in his playing. He combines the jagged but pithy sensibility of Thelonious Monk, the sweet harmony of Duke Ellington, and the nasty rhythm of Bud Powell. His African leanings come out in the expansiveness and deep soulful energy that permeate the proceedings.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LANGUAGE

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 2-7: **Dee Dee Bridgewater's** last two albums, "This Is New," from 2002, and "J'ai Deux Amours," from 2005, celebrated Kurt Weill and French chansons, respectively. Her new release, "Red Earth: A Malian Journey," explores her African roots. The wondrous vocalist's touring band includes musicians from Mali.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district that opened in 1955, was recently renovated. The lighting has been improved, as has the sound, and the signature wraparound Vertès murals were cleaned and discreetly expanded. Among surviving cabaret stars, only **Eartha Kitt** is capable of christening the refreshed space. She's here through Oct. 27. On Mondays the café is home to **Woody Allen and the Eddie Davis New Orleans Jazz Band.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Oct. 2-7: **George Wein,** who organized the first Newport Jazz Festival, in 1954, and has since built a music-festival empire, takes time to indulge his passion for performing. The Newport All Stars are headed by the legendary impresario (who turns eighty-two on Oct. 3), on piano, alongside the soloists **Randy Brecker,** on trumpet, **Lew Tabackin,** on saxophone and flute, and **Howard Alden,** on guitar.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 4-6: **Mark Murphy.** On his current release, "Love Is What Stays," Murphy, since the fifties a paragon of the art of vocal improvisation, reinvents standards as well as tunes associated with Johnny Cash and Coldplay. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 4-5: The Cuban native **Dafnis Prieto,** an in-demand drummer who is as well versed in Latin idioms as he is in mainstream jazz, leads his Absolute Quintet, which features the keyboardist **Jason Lindner** and a string section. Oct. 8: Although **Ben Sidran** gained early fame for his collaboration with the rocker Steve Miller (he co-wrote "Space Cowboy"), the pianist, singer, and composer is perhaps best known as a host of shows on National Public Radio. He's here to celebrate the release of "Talking Jazz," a twenty-four-CD compendium of interviews with illustrious musicians. He'll be joined by **Phil Woods,** on alto saxophone, and the bassist **Rufus Reid** and the drummer **Carl Allen.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 2-7: The pianist **Geri Allen** is one of the major figures to arise from New York's jazz scene of the eighties. She is a strong soloist and composer, drawing from both mainstream and free-jazz sources. Her trio here includes the bassist **Kenny Davis** and the great drummer **Jimmy Cobb,** the last surviving member of Miles Davis's "Kind of Blue" ensemble. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

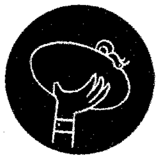
ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"The Age of Rembrandt: Dutch Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ The Harvard-educated literary scholar Lin Yutang (1895-1976) moved to New York from his native China in 1936, at the urging of the novelist Pearl Buck. Here, he wrote popular books on Eastern culture, and introduced contemporary Chinese art to local audiences. **"Bridging East and West: The Chinese Diaspora and**

Lin Yutang" features forty-three paintings, calligraphic works, and prints by nineteen artists from Lin's collection, all of which have been given (or promised as gifts) by his family to the museum. An implicitly personal connection to the collector marks many; Zhang Daqian's 1965 painting of mushrooms looks cheerful but bears an inscription bemoaning the expat's yearning for the authentic flavors of home. Through Feb. 10, 2008. ♦ **"Abstract Expressionism and Other Modern Works: The Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection."** Through Feb. 3, 2008. ♦ **"Impressed by Light: British Photographs from Paper Negatives, 1840-1860."** Through Dec. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ The Butterfly Conservatory reopens on Oct. 6. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art."** Through Jan. 27, 2008. ♦ **"Brushed with Light: American Landscape Watercolors from the Collection."** Through Jan. 27, 2008. ♦ **"Global Feminisms Remix."** Through Feb. 3, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)



TABLES FOR TWO
GEMMA

335 Bowery, at 3rd St. (212-505-7300)—This new restaurant, set in a boutique hotel along an avenue once better known for flophouses than for fashionistas, has the feel of a soundstage. Among the melodramatic accoutrements—cascades of melted wax, dangling hams and gleaming copper pans, gothic chandeliers—the sense of artifice is so great that one wonders if the massive wooden beams might be hollow, the wrought iron just bits of tin. One recent evening, a trio of young women—long blond hair, clingy black dresses—pulled out a camera and called the waiter over to take a group shot. "Sorry, ladies," he said. "We don't allow cameras, because we have lots of celebrities who eat here, and they get really nervous." A diner, hoping for star sightings, craned her neck. "Is he famous?" she asked, pointing to a raffish young gentleman who was commanding a long table of hangers-on. "He's not a celebrity," her companion observed. "He just thinks he is."

As far as make-believe goes, Gemma offers—with remarkably flattering lighting, comfortable leather banquettes, and a cast of attentive servers—a soothing dose of escapism. And, while food isn't really the point, the kitchen manages to turn out some appealing items. An entrée of sea bass, cooked and served on a thin cedar plank, was flaky and moist. Zucchini blossoms were crisp and delicious, as fried things tend to be, and a squid-ink pasta was perfectly sauced—lightly enough to allow the pasta's flavor to emerge. But the flops are major. A special "truffle" pizza arrived with a meagre sprinkling of mushrooms; the *prosciutto cotto* came in oddly thick, salty chunks. After a bite or two, the table gave up; the waiter insisted on bringing something else. "We want to make you happy!" he said. A *burrata* pizza arrived a few minutes later—better, but, still, the dough tasted weird, as if they'd used twice as much flour as they were supposed to. With the order of a calzone di Nutella for dessert came an ominous omen: foot-long serrated knives, laid out on the table with ritual solemnity. The calzone arrived on a pizza board, glistening, dusted with powdered sugar, the size of a deflated football. "I'm a little nervous," a guest admitted. "I don't think it's natural to eat something that big." Some sawing, and the skin was breached. The Nutella and ricotta oozed out, coagulated unappealingly on the wood, and tasted as though it could rot even the sweetest tooth. (Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées $13-$36.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Lines, Grids, Stains, Words."** Through Oct. 22. ♦ **"Present Tense: Photographs by JoAnn Verburg."** Through Nov. 5. ♦ **"Lost Vanguard: Soviet Modernist Architecture, 1922-1932."** Through Oct. 29. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Richard Prince: Spiritual America."** Through Jan. 8, 2008. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Rudolf Stingel."** Through Oct. 14. ♦ The three paintings in **"Neither New Nor Correct: New Work by Mark Bradford"** are really giant collages, cobbled together from scraps of posters, magazines, tape, tinfoil, and other found-in-the-street detritus. The works are further manipulated by sanding and by a unique process in which Bradford embeds string beneath the layers, then pulls it out, creating erosional patterns that cut through his surfaces like so many riverbeds. The evocation of topography—the suggestion of geological ebb and flow—is offset by patches of battered silver that suggest chrome and lamé and by neon snippets of almost legible language. Through Nov. 25. ♦ **"Danny Lyon: Montage, Film, and Still Photography."** Through Dec. 2. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Zhang Huan: Altered States."** Through Jan. 20, 2008. ♦ **"The Arts of Kashmir."** Opens Oct. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Piranesi as Designer."** Through Jan. 20, 2008. ♦ **"Provoking Magic: Lighting of Ingo Maurer."** Through Jan. 20, 2008. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
1109 Fifth Ave., at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Camille Pissarro: Impressions of City and Country."** The perfect-attendance award goes to Camille Pissarro (1830-1903) for appearing in all eight of the Impressionists' exhibitions, held between 1874 and 1886. Beyond this, Pissarro's efforts have long been overshadowed by the water lilies of Monet and the apple-cheeked cherubim of Renoir. Any show devoted to Pissarro is by default an attempt at revising the Impressionist hierarchy. This one approaches it by casting Pissarro as a socially engaged artist, an armchair anarchist who focussed on the plight of people, not just on their placement within his compositions. The argument isn't too

It took us 125 years to use the first trillion barrels of oil.

We'll use the next trillion in 30.

Transportation fuel consumption is expected to increase more than 50% by 2030.

convincing. Pissarro's broken brushstrokes and Pointillist experiments often take precedence over human subjects, and ultimately he lacks the virtuosity of his better-known peers. Through Feb. 3, 2008. ♦ **"Isaac Bashevis Singer and the Lower East Side: Photographs by Bruce Davidson."** Through Feb. 3, 2008. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Painted with Words: Vincent van Gogh's Letters to Émile Bernard."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

KONRAD CRAMER
Cramer (1888-1963), a German-born American painter whose fame has long since faded, took up photography in the nineteen-thirties under the influence of Alfred Stieglitz. The twenty-nine black-and-white vintage prints gathered here position him as a model modernist, whose conservative impulses were tempered by an experimental streak. For every misty landscape, weathered barn door, or rain-wet leaf, there's a solarized female nude, an enigmatic still-life, or the image of a small-scale sculptural construction that anticipates the recent work of Sara VanDerBeek. Two handsome Cubist compositions of what appear to be folded paper and reflected light have an equally contemporary echo in Eileen Quinlan's mysterious interplays of mirrors and smoke. Through Nov. 3. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 212-752-1223.)

LARS TUNBJÖRK
With his pictures of anonymous office spaces, this Swedish photographer is working familiar ground—but with such wit and agility that it hardly matters. Although some of the best images here are of empty cubicles and generic workstations—interiors that vary not at all from Tokyo to Stockholm—Tunbjörk is also adept at comic tableaux. In a number of these, workers, stiff and isolated, might as well be mannequins, but in others they're more like zoo creatures caught in impromptu performances. A group of Japanese salarymen doing stretching exercises at their desks, and an anxious woman crouched under a conference table collating papers, exhibit behavior unique to their habitat. Through Oct. 27. (Cohen Amador, 41 E. 57th St. 212-759-6740.)

JOANN VERBURG
No matter how substantial, Verburg's show is bound to be seen as a footnote to her current MOMA retrospective, especially since all the photographs revisit the subjects explored there. The photographer's husband appears in several multipart pieces, usually prone and with a newspaper at his side, a balding Everyman slumped under the weight of the world. But the wooded Italian landscape is Verburg's prime focus, and her pictures of ancient oaks in dappled sunlight render current events all the more transitory. The artist allows her images to swim in and out of focus, giving them a dreamy, expressionistic quality that lets time expand; past, present, and future coexist here. Through Oct. 13. (Pace MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

"30/40"
"Its existence gives the art world a rare shot of self-esteem," Peter Schjedahl wrote of the Marian Goodman gallery, in 2004. To celebrate its thirtieth anniversary, the gallery invited the theorist Benjamin H. D. Buchloh to curate a two-part survey of works by artists it has shown. The first installment ranges wide, with twenty-one participants (Dara Birnbaum, Christian Boltanski, James Coleman, Sigmar Polke, and Lawrence Weiner among them), and is a testa-

DVD NOTES
WORDS AND MUSIC

"Saturday Night Fever," issued in a thirtieth-anniversary edition by Paramount, remains as exhilarating as it was the day it came out. The charismatic exuberance of John Travolta's career-defining performance as Tony Manero, the dance king of Brooklyn, is all the more appealing for the hard-edged realism of the social and emotional context in which it's set. Based on a 1976 *New York* magazine article by Nik Cohn (which the writer later confessed to having mostly made up), the director John Badham and the screenwriter Norman Wexler revealed the close-knit working-class Italian neighborhood to be a backwater whose time had come: untouched by the social and political upheavals of the sixties, it now seemed not only warm but also cool. Yet in retrospect, the patterned steps of disco come off as the last bastion of an old order, the passing of which the film movingly dramatizes. In Wexler's sharp script and crude dialogue, Tony and his friends—the "faces"—are held fast by unyielding views on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and homosexuality, and Tony is forced to confront the pain and destruction that result from his family's and community's narrow expectations. As much as the movie celebrates the tight bonds of old-world New York, it also shows it on the verge of collapse.

The first talking picture, **"The Jazz Singer"** (Warner Home Video), was also the first musical, as well as a triumph of immigrant self-assertion. The story of a cantor's son who runs away from his Lower East Side home to sing "raggy time music" still used intertitles for most of the dialogue—though not for its star Al Jolson's vibrant cry, "You ain't heard nothin' yet!" His manic energy and tight, wailing tenor seem campy, too "hot" for the cinema, but the erotic brazenness of his hip-gyrating, spread-legged delivery is still thrillingly modern, and his tangy New York accent opened the door to such streetwise stars as James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, and Paul Muni. Two bonus disks offer an informative documentary on the development of sound in movies and short subjects showing the sort of vaudevillians that talking pictures put out of business (as well as a sly pair, George Burns and Gracie Allen, who broke in).

Weimar Berlin's sordid underworld and its intellectual left-wing radicalism fused in Brecht and Weill's **"Threepenny Opera."** G. W. Pabst's overstuffed 1931 film of it (on Criterion) brought no joy to Brecht, who sued him (a talking-head bonus details their conflict); but there, too, the performance style of Lotte Lenya and company is a delightful shock. The rough-edged cabaret manner owes nothing to the opera house and everything to the gutter—in the opening number, "Moritat" (later translated as "Mack the Knife"), Ernst Busch's trilled "r"s alone evoke a lost world of menace lurking beneath suave affectations of civility.

—*Richard Brody*

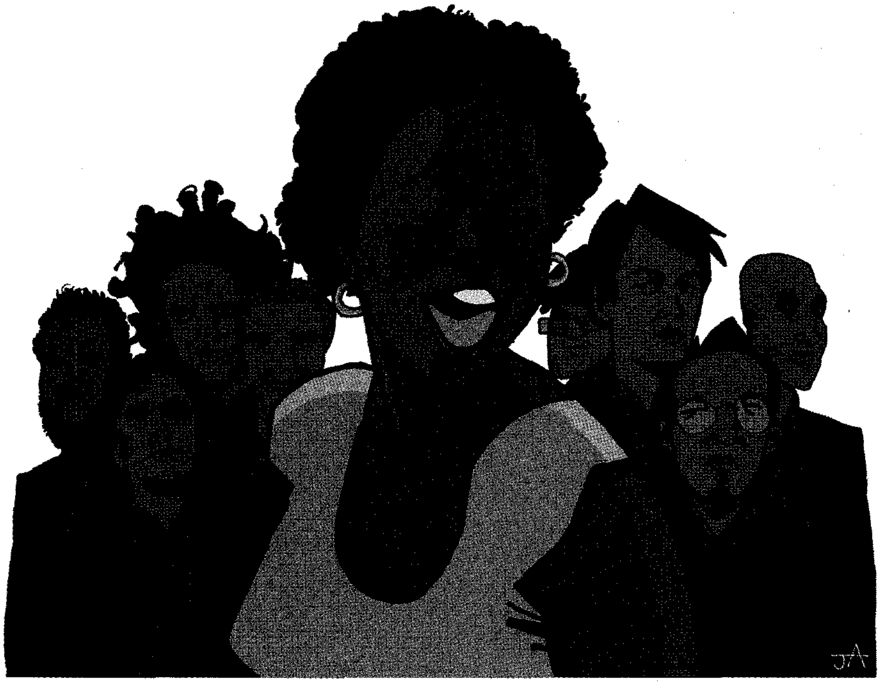
ment to Goodman's vision—and her faith in conceptual rigor. That's not to say that the show lacks beauty or humor: witness a trio of smeary flower paintings by Gerhard Richter, or Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture of himself in a Beuysian felt suit, dangling forlornly from a coatrack. Through Oct. 13. (24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

Short List

WILLIAM HENRY FOX TALBOT: Kraus, 962 Park Ave., at 82nd St. 212-794-2064. Through Dec. 30. **"25 YEARS: A CELEBRATION."** Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through Oct. 20. **"THE WRITER'S BRUSH":** Shapolsky, 152 E. 65th St. 212-452-1094. Through Oct. 27.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

EBERHARD HAVEKOST
The German painter's canvases move between formalist flatness and fuzzy politics, with images of American flags, sometimes blanked out by gray paint, and of young black men arranged on a beach in a vague scenario (refugees being detained, perhaps). The title of the show is "Zensur," German for censorship, and the names of paintings are cited in German, too, which makes getting a handle on the work difficult for an American audience. Yet America seems to be at the center of Havekost's critique—if, that is, a critique is occurring at all. Through Oct. 13. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)



Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings pay a visit to the Apollo Theatre on October 6.

JASHAR AWAN

WOLFGANG LAIB
The artist's new work looks just like his old work, but it feels different somehow. A sense of rote production has leached out some of the magic that Laib can elicit from his organic substances and simple shapes. The materials remain undeniably sensuous: bright-yellow hazelnut pollen, arranged in mounds on the floor; house-like forms made of red granite slicked with ghee, and of black granite patinated with smoke. But the inclusion of black-and-white photographs of statues in South Indian shrines feels opportunistic, as if Laib's fatigued ideas needed infusions of borrowed spirituality. Through Oct. 13. (Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181.)

RAYMOND PETTIBON
Pettibon's brushy, text-littered, comics-inspired drawings—fixed to the wall with pushpins and hung in groups—are the visual equivalent of a pack of brilliant, disturbed existentialist vagabonds muttering amongst themselves. This time, the muttering grows louder, and the references are more pointed. The image of a coffin draped with an American flag recurs. A wall drawing carries the warped slogan "Two Cheers for the Red White and Blue." Pettibon used to be contemporary art's answer to disaffected So Cal surf-punk culture; these days he's looking more like a full-on engaged artist—Otto Dix, Max Beckmann, and George Grosz rolled into one. Through Oct. 20. (Zwirner, 519 W. 20th St. 212-727-2070.)

UGO RONDINONE
Twelve tremendous, goofy heads, one for each month of the year, fill the center of the gallery. The playful final chapter in Rondinone's "Moonrise" series, they stand eight feet tall and are pocked with thousands of fingerprints; they're simple, lumpy, and funny, like pieces of fruit adorned with googly eyes. As a rough bronze keyhole, set in the wall, puffs out a steady stream of air, small line drawings on gessoed linen depict simple items (windows, shoes, teacups). Short poems, written so lightly on the wall that they're invisible from across the room, assert Rondinone's romantic longing: "i am tired of having hands i want wings." Through Oct. 27. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

GARRY WINOGRAND
There are no revelations, and few unfamiliar images, among the more than forty Winogrand photographs here, but the work still has an irresistible effortlessness; every picture feels accidental and just right. Included are photos from several famous series—on zoos, public gatherings, and women seen in passing, the last characterized by a boyish sense of delight at the presence of feminine beauty. Marilyn Monroe, Norman Mailer, Hugh Hefner, and Diane Arbus crop up elsewhere, but they have serious competition from these women and from the "Naked Hippie," a young man with wild eyes and raised arms who parts a crowd like a demented savior. Through Oct. 20. (Bell, 511 W. 25th St. 212-691-3883.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JON KESSLER
Small collages sport faces, cut from magazines, that have been torn to bits, reassembled, and

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The world is growing by more than
70 million people a year.

So is that a problem, or a solution?

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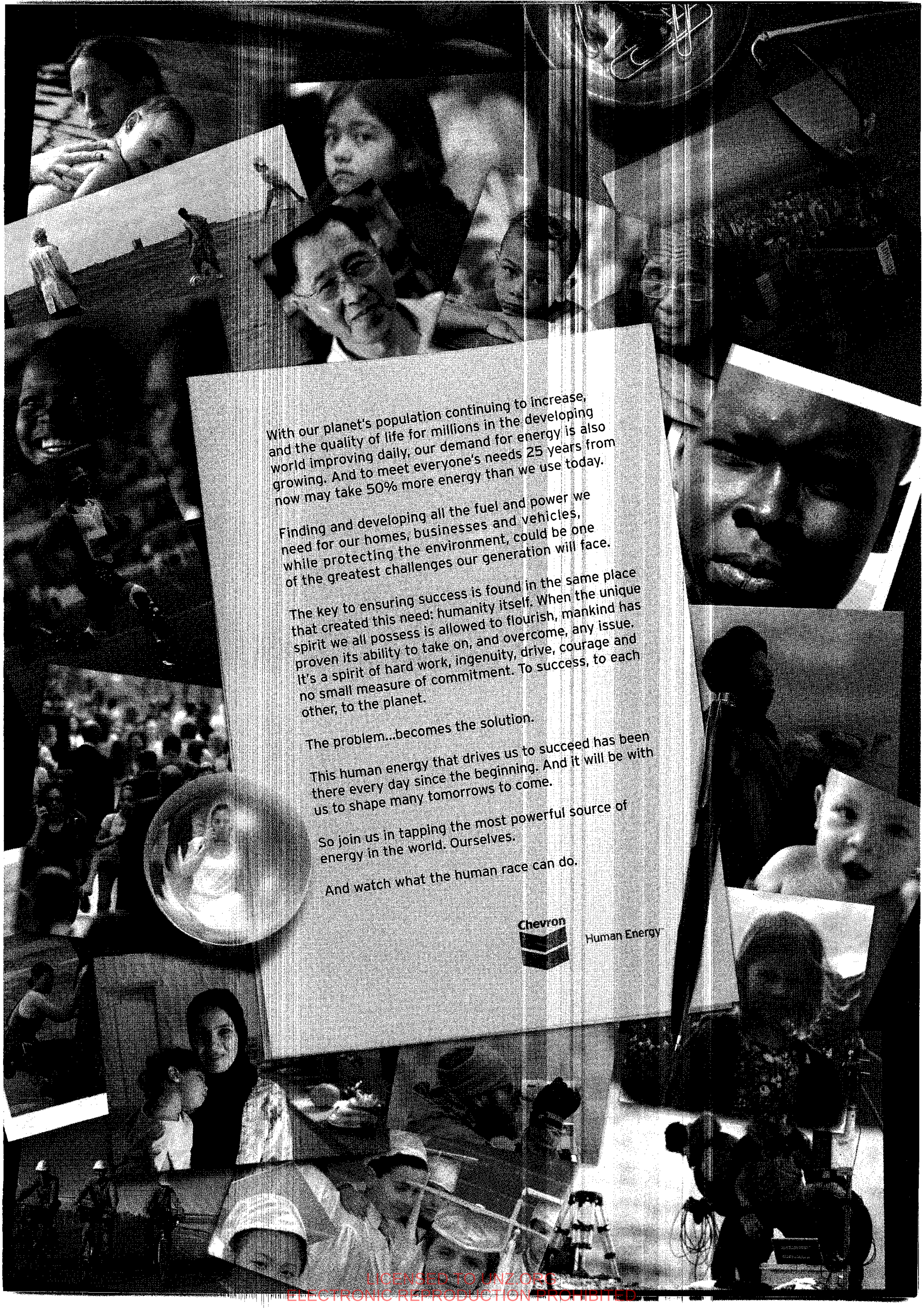

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embellished with paint, yarn, shredded cash, and what a checklist cites as "artist's hair." The results are gruesome mash-ups, violent and handsome, united by scathing political commentary on the war on terror, on affronts to privacy, on the democratic process, and on decency. Rumsfeld, Ahmadinejad, and Putin all appear, adorned with sprouts of gray hair that make them look like hoary clowns; the familiar faces of starlets and fashion models take on monstrous forms. Kessler's Frankensteinian experiments seethe with disgust, but there's grace here, too, if little patience. Through Oct. 25. (Drawing Center, 40 Wooster St. 212-219-2166.)

Zuill Bailey and Simone Dinnerstein, at the Metropolitan Museum on Oct. 12.

MICHELE ASSELIN

"THE GEOMETRY OF HOPE: LATIN AMERICAN ABSTRACT ART"
A short list of materials employed in the service of postwar Latin-American abstraction reads: wood, copper wire, glass, rubber, burlap, and photographs—not to mention workaday paint on canvas. While North Americans were getting down and dirty with drips and impasto, their Latino counterparts were pushing the boundaries of shape and materials, challenging the idea of abstraction as flat and contained within a rectangle. Names like Ligia Clark, Jesús Rafael Soto, and Hélio Oiticica will be familiar to many viewers. But as the show of works from the collection of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros trots out lesser-known painters from São Paolo, Montevideo, and Buenos Aires, the embarrassment of riches makes the New York-centric view of mid-century abstraction look awfully provincial. Through Dec. 8. (Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6789.)

DANCE

CLOUD GATE DANCE THEATRE OF TAIWAN
"Wild Cursive" is the last in a trilogy of dances by Lin Hwai-min that take inspiration from Chinese calligraphy. The title is a translation of *kuang chao*, the most improvisatory and abstract calligraphic tradition, and the set consists of huge scrolls of rice paper down which black ink streams. The dance is like that: it flows and flows, accompanied by sparse sounds of wind and water, coalescing into doodles and breathtaking shapes. Executing Lin's East-West mix, the dancers are amazingly lithe, almost inhumanly so. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 2 and Oct. 4-6 at 7:30 and Oct. 7 at 3.)

"REVOLUTION"
The Irish-step-dancing champion Joel Hanna teams up with the tap dancer Michael Schulster to create a new rock-and-roll show. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 2-3 at 7:30, Oct. 4-5 at 8, Oct. 6 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 7 at 2 and 7:30.)

"FALL FOR DANCE"
City Center's festival of ten-dollar programs is like a speed-dating championship for dance companies; in one go you see five ensembles, and just maybe you'll fall in love. Some highlights this week are the New York début of Christopher Wheeldon's highly anticipated new ensemble, Morphoses, a performance of the postmodern dance pioneer Trisha Brown's "Spanish Dance" (set to Bob Dylan's version of "Early Morning Rain"), from 1973, and Damian Woetzel, of New York City Ballet, dancing the Bach solo that Jerome Robbins created for Baryshnikov, "A Suite of Dances." For a full schedule, visit www.citycenter.org. Performances sell out; returned tickets are available at the box office at 6:30 on the day of the show. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Oct. 2-6 at 8.)

TERE O'CONNOR DANCE
O'Connor's "Rammed Earth," created in collaboration with a cast of unfailingly interesting dancers (Heather Olson, Matthew Rogers, Hilary Clark, and Christopher Williams), veers from dry experiment into droll satire and back. Co-presented by Danspace Project. (The Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 212-352-3101. Oct. 3-6 at 7 and 9 and Oct. 7 at 5 and 7.)

"FRANCEOFF!"
Terry Dean Bartlett and Katie Workum present a twist on their dance revue at P.S. 122, in which the participants are French, Francophiles, or inspired by French themes. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Oct. 3 at 7 and 9.)

MIKA KUROSAWA
A major veteran of Japanese contemporary dance, Kurosawa blends a Judson School asceticism with a sometimes surreal theatricality. At the Kitchen, she brings to New York for the first time one of the many iterations of her solo "Romantic Night." She also interacts, improvisationally, with the New York-based dancers Jennifer Monson and Margarita Guergue, the multi-instrumentalist Hahn Rowe, and the Japanese musical experimentalist known as SKANK. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Oct. 3-4 at 8.)

"ARGENTINE NIGHTS"

The World Music Institute holds a four-day festival of Argentine music and dance, at Symphony Space. On Oct. 4-5, Tango Connection, a thirteen-member ensemble led by Mariela Franganillo, performs a gallery of tango styles, from a rough-edged early street-corner approach to modern stage variations. On Oct. 6, Roxana Fontan and her troupe, Fontango, focus on the tango as a sung art form. On Oct. 7, an accordionist leads a modern take on *chamamé*, folk music and dance from northeastern Argentina. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Oct. 4-6 at 8 and Oct. 7 at 7.)

MARGARET JENKINS DANCE COMPANY

Aspects of "A Slipping Glimpse," by the doyenne of San Francisco dance, approach unintentional parody of Bay Area dippiness. The fruit of a residency in India, the piece features a New Agey score and intoned poetry about past lives and everyone dreaming the same dream. Yet there's much to savor: a plenitude of movement and fugitive compositions ebbing and flowing across multiple platforms, more than any single viewer could absorb. Dancers from India and their gestures are integrated adroitly, and though the work begins weakly, in the churchyard outside, it gathers force as it goes. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Oct. 4-6 at 8:30.)

BALLET FOLKLÓRICO DE MÉXICO DE AMALIA HERNÁNDEZ

Mexico's premier folkloric troupe, fifty-three years old, returns to New York. The program, to be repeated at the Beacon Theatre later this month, is a typical stuffed piñata of pre-Hispanic rituals, earnest historical re-creations, and all sorts of regional festivals and traditions, including a lasso number and the signature finale, complete with the Mexican hat dance and streamers in the audience. Decked out in extravagant costumes and aided by sixteen musicians, the mammoth company always puts on a good show. (Lehman Center, 250 Bedford Park Blvd. W., the Bronx. 718-960-8833. Oct. 5 at 8.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"

The Guggenheim's performance-and-discussion series offers a peek at American Ballet Theatre's upcoming season at City Center. The principal dancers Xiomara Reyes and Michele Wiles will perform in a roster that includes Antony Tudor's melancholy "The Leaves Are Fading" (1975) and "From Here On Out" (premièring Oct. 26), a collaboration between the Bordeaux-born, thirty-year-old New York City Ballet principal dancer Benjamin Millepied and the even younger composer Nico Muhly, a protégé of Philip Glass. Muhly joins Amanda McKerrow and John Gardner, both of whom staged "The Leaves Are Fading," in a discussion about the works. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Oct. 7-8 at 7:30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

One might wish for a more authentically girlish demeanor, but Anna Netrebko's dazzling, vampish presence and rich, colorful voice offer a solid foundation for the Met's revival of Gounod's **"Roméo et Juliette"**; Stéphane Degout, in contrast, brings Gallic brilliance and élan to the role of Mercutio. Joseph Kaiser, a highly touted young American tenor, makes his Met début as Roméo, as does the impressive young mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard in the role of Stéphano; Plácido Domingo conducts, with style. (Oct. 3 at 7:30 and Oct. 6 at 8.) ♦ Sonja Frisell's grand, conservative production of **"Aida"** is so overpowering that it can easily survive the fluctuating casts that the Met rotates through it. This one boasts some notable singers, including Angela M. Brown, Dolora Zajick, Marco Berti, and Andrzej Dobber; Kazushi Ono. (Oct. 4 at 8.) ♦ Peter Gelb's second opening-night gamble is a successful one: a sober but involving new production, by Mary Zimmerman, of **"Lucia di Lammermoor,"** in which a glittering cast (including Natalie Dessay, Marcello Giordani, Mariusz Kwiecien, and John Relyea) sings under the experienced direction of James Levine. (Oct. 5 and Oct. 9 at 8; Jens Georg Bachmann conducts the Oct. 5 performance.) ♦ Jonathan Miller's production of **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Isabel Bayrakdarian, and Erwin Schrott; Philippe Jordan, a fine young Mozartean, conducts. (Oct. 6 at 1:30.) ♦ Last year's season began with Anthony Minghella's ravishingly cinematic production of **"Madama Butterfly"**; it returns, boasting an arguably superior cast that features Patricia Racette and Roberto Alagna; Mark Elder. (Oct. 8 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

A new production by Stephen Lawless, borrowed from the Dallas Opera, of the great verismo double bill of Mascagni's **"Cavalleria Rusticana"** and Leoncavallo's **"Pagliacci"** arrives with a cast featuring Anna Maria Chiuri and Brandon Jovanovich in the first opera and Maria Kanyova, Carl Tanner, and Andrew Oakden in the second; George Manahan conducts. (Oct. 3 and Oct. 9 at 7:30 and Oct. 6 at 8.) ♦ The admired American mezzo-soprano Beth Clayton should make a strong impression in the title role of **"Carmen,"** a revival of the Jonathan Eaton production in which she shares the stage with a cast that includes Jennifer Black, Scott Piper, and Carlos Archuleta; Joseph Rescigno. (Oct. 5 at 8 and Oct. 7 at 1:30.) ♦ The durable Harold Prince production of **"Don Giovanni,"** restaged by Albert Sherman, with Aaron St. Clair Nicholson (in the title role), Mardi Byers, Julianna Di Giacomo, Bruce Sledge, and Daniel Mobbs; David Wroe. (Oct. 6 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

DICAPO OPERA: "ROMÉO ET JULIETTE"

New York's third professional opera company has appointed a composer-in-residence (the estimable Tobias Picker) and tightened its casting. Hopefully the Met's current production won't dampen the audience for Gounod's gossamer score from 1867, in which the title roles will be sung by Jason Karn and Kristin Sampson; Pacien Mazzagatti conducts. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 212-288-9438, ext. 10. Oct. 4 at 6:30 and Oct. 6 at 8. Through Oct. 14.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Lorin Maazel and his orchestra are concentrating on Tchaikovsky in the first few weeks of the season. The ebullient Third Symphony (the so-called "Polish," because of its polonaise finale) is definitely something of a rarity; Maazel conducts it as the conclusion of a concert that begins with the Violin Concerto, interpreted by the rapidly ascending Dutch violinist Janine Jansen. (Oct. 3-4 at 7:30.) ♦ In two further concerts, the beloved Fourth Symphony replaces the "Polish." (Oct. 5-6 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

LUCERNE FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA CARNEGIE HALL RESIDENCY

The revered Claudio Abbado was to conduct the season-opening concerts of this dynamic young ensemble, which he co-founded and which is based at the prestigious Lucerne Festival, in Switzerland; David Robertson and Pierre Boulez have come to the rescue. Oct. 3 at 7: The opening-night gala is all-Beethoven, with Robertson collaborating with Murray Perahia in the Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major and with the vocal soloists Melanie Diener, Anna Larsson, Jonas Kaufmann, and Reinhard Hagen (along with the Westminster Symphonic Choir) in the Symphony No. 9, "Choral." ♦ Oct. 4 at 8: A repeat of the Ninth Symphony. ♦ Oct. 5 at 8: The Mahler Chamber Orchestra is both the predecessor and the constant core of the L.F.O.; the trenchant, analytical pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard conducts Haydn's noble Symphony No. 102 in B-Flat Major and solos with them in Mozart's Concerto No. 13 in C Major and Beethoven's Concerto No. 2, also in B-Flat Major. ♦ Oct. 6 at 8: Boulez conducts the full Lucerne band in Mahler's spacious Sym-

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phony No. 3; Larsson returns, joining the women of the Westminster choir and the American Boychoir. (212-247-7800. For more concerts, see Recitals.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
James Levine conducts his splendid group in its first Carnegie Hall concert of the season, an all-Ravel program: "Alborada del Gracioso," "Pavane for a Dead Princess," the Piano Concerto in G Major (with Jean-Yves Thibaudet), and "Daphnis et Chloé" (complete). (212-247-7800. Oct. 8 at 8.)

RECITALS

KRONOS QUARTET: "MORE THAN FOUR"
The pioneering group's own composition "Shuffle 25/Bloodstone—Remix 1" begins its new program at the Next Wave Festival, which also includes the U.S. première of "Uniko," by the accordionist and vocalist Kimmo Pohjonen and the sampling artist Samuli Kosminen (better known as the Finnish duo Kluster) and the world première of "Dear Mme.," a music-theatre work by Erik Sanko that features not only the usual sound and lighting design of Kronos concerts but also a crew of puppeteers (including Sanko himself). (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Oct. 3 and Oct. 5-6 at 7:30.)

SOLOISTS OF THE LUCERNE FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA
As part of the orchestra's Carnegie Hall residency, its members break up into groups to play chamber music. Oct. 5 at 7:30: Works for strings by Mendelssohn (the Quintet No. 2 in B-Flat Major), Caplet, Rossini, and Tchaikovsky ("Souvenir de Florence"). (Weill Recital Hall.) ♦ Oct. 7 at 4: Pierre-Laurent Aimard joins the musicians in Mozart's Piano Quartet in G Minor, Ravel's Piano Trio, and Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony (in Webern's arrangement). (Zankel Hall.) ♦ Oct. 7 at 7:30: Music by Mozart, Janáček (the entrancing wind sextet "Youth"), and Brahms (the String Sextet in G Major). (Zankel Hall.) (212-247-7800.)

MILLER THEATRE COMPOSER PORTRAITS: ESA-PEKKA SALONEN
Not since the age of Britten and Bernstein has there been a figure like Salonen—a major conductor who is also an active, world-class composer. George Steel's series, a vital part of the Miller schedule, begins with an evening devoted to Salonen's works (including "Floof," "Mania," and the New York première of "Memoria") offered by such musicians as the soprano Tony Arnold, the pianist Blair McMillen, and the Imani Winds. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Oct. 5 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
Oct. 5-6 at 8: An enticing week at the floating chamber-music series includes a concert by Mark Peskanov, its music director, joining André-Michel Schub in all three of Brahms's Sonatas for Violin and Piano. ♦ Oct. 7 at 4: The energetic Pacifica Quartet, currently enjoying a residency at Columbia, offers string quartets by Mendelssohn, Ligeti (the increasingly popular No. 1, "Métamorphoses Nocturnes"), and Beethoven (Op. 59, No. 3). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

CÉDRIC TIBERGHIEN
The Frick Collection is a locus for up-and-coming European musicians making their New York débuts. The elegant and assured French pianist, a Harmonia Mundi recording artist, does so this week with an impressive program: works by Chopin (the Ballades Nos. 1 and 4), Franck, and Beethoven (the Sonatas Nos. 27 and 32). (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. Oct. 7 at 5.)

SEQUITUR
This classy new-music group balances uptown academic distinction with downtown energy. For its next concert, settings of texts by the delightful Donald Barthelme by Stephen Dembski ("The Show") and Harold Meltzer ("Sinbad") precede a perfor-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
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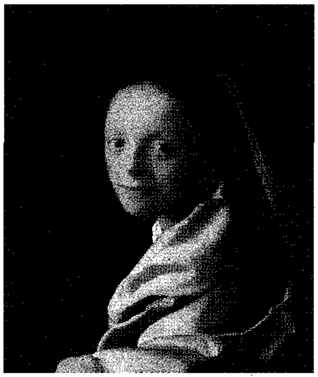

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, JOHANNES VERMEER, "STUDY OF A YOUNG WOMAN"

It sounded like a bad, even a cynical idea: the Metropolitan Museum's decision to arrange "The Age of Rembrandt"—the present exhibition of all two hundred and twenty-eight circa-seventeenth-century Dutch paintings in the museum's collection—along a time line of the works' acquisition, beginning in 1871. Wall texts extoll the donors. The ploy suggests a cargo cult, setting out lures for prospective benefactors. So it may be, but the jagged shuffle of Rembrandts (and pictures formerly known as Rembrandts), Vermeers, Ruisdaels, and Halses, along with other only relatively inferior treasures of a prodigious epoch, happens to thrill. Major works ambush the eye, and minor ones cast piquant sidelights. Freed from locked-down curatorial consensus, you can build your own canon—which will likely reconfirm Rembrandt's towering supremacy, but freshly, after a fair fight. You may even adopt a pet little master (Gerard ter Borch is mine). Sportively arbitrary hanging of great art should happen more often. How about a reinstallation at MOMA according to artists' hat sizes?

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

mance of Schoenberg's magical "Pierrot Lunaire," fronted by the mezzo-soprano Mary Nessinger. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 8 at 8.)

PAUL JACOBS
The captivating young organist—who seems well on the road to becoming the next American popularizer of his instrument in the tradition of E. Power Biggs—performs Messiaen's massive "Livre du Saint Sacrement" at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, near Times Square. (145 W. 46th St. Oct. 9 at 8. No tickets required.

MOVIES OPENING

FEEL THE NOISE
A drama about an aspiring Bronx hip-hop artist who is pursued by thugs and flees to Puerto Rico. Starring Omarion Grandberry and Giancarlo Esposito. Directed by Alejandro Chomski. Opening Oct. 5. (In wide release.)

FINISHING THE GAME
Justin Lin directed this mockumentary, about the search for Bruce Lee's successor. Opening Oct. 5. (IFC Center.)

FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO
A documentary about the evangelical war on homosexuality. Directed by Daniel Karslake. Opening Oct. 5. (Quad Cinema.)

THE GOOD NIGHT
In this romantic comedy, directed by Jake Paltrow, a musician (Martin Freeman) in conflict with his girlfriend (Gwyneth Paltrow) falls in love with a woman he sees in his dreams (Penélope Cruz). Opening Oct. 5. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE HEARTBREAK KID
Bobby and Peter Farrelly directed this remake of the Elaine May comedy, about a newlywed man who falls for another woman on his honeymoon. Starring Ben Stiller, Michelle Monaghan, and Jerry Stiller. Opening Oct. 5. (In wide release.)

KURT COBAIN: ABOUT A SON
A documentary about the musician based on audio interviews with him; directed by AJ Schnack. Opening Oct. 3. (IFC Center.)

LAKE OF FIRE
Tony Kaye directed this documentary, about the opposing sides in America's abortion debate. Opening Oct. 3. (Film Forum.)

MICHAEL CLAYTON
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 5. (In wide release.)

MY KID COULD PAINT THAT
A documentary by Amir Bar-Lev, about a four-year-old girl whose paintings have sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Opening Oct. 5. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE SEEKER: THE DARK IS RISING
A horror fantasy about a young man who travels through time to fight evil forces. Directed by David L. Cunningham; starring Alexander Ludwig, Ian McShane, and Frances Conroy. Opening Oct. 5. (In wide release.)

STRANGE CULTURE
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Oct. 5. (Cinema Village.)

NOW PLAYING

ACROSS THE UNIVERSE
Julie Taymor, who staged "The Lion King" and directed a hallucinogenic film version of "Titus Andronicus," lavishes all her visual genius on this overscaled production, which connects almost three dozen Beatles songs with the thinnest thread of a story. Set in the mid-sixties, the film is about an English boy from Liverpool (Jim Sturgess) who moves to Greenwich Village and meets a beautiful, soon to be radicalized girl (Evan Rachel Wood); together with her Vietnam-bound brother, they embark on the trippy adventures of the era. The film is populated with characters named Jude, Lucy, JoJo, Prudence, and Sadie, and the Beatles songs have been reworked (by Elliot Goldenthal and T-Bone Burnett) for the varying degrees of musical talent on display (Bono is fantastic; Eddie Izzard, less so). Because the screenplay is light on dialogue and most of the story is told through the songs, the film never really gets a thorough hold on any of its characters—it's cameo-friendly but emotionally neutered. Still, it's an audacious and creatively risky wonder, with enough visual pizzazz amid the insanity to capture the spirit of those turbulent times.—*Bruce Diones* (In limited release.)

THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD
Seven years ago, Andrew Dominik directed a film called "Chopper," a brisk and alarming account of a career criminal whose infamy has shaded into legend. Now he has done it again—at greater length, with bigger stars, far fewer laughs, and only a fraction of the effect. Brad Pitt plays Jesse James, who is at the tail end of his career and joins up with his brother Frank (Sam Shepard) for one last train robbery, then spends the rest of the story skulking under an alias or settling scores. James also humors his young admirer, Robert Ford (Casey Affleck), who starts off wanting to imitate his hero and ends up killing him. The film concludes with a fascinating, if sketchy, account of Ford's own celebrity, but it can hardly compensate for the slug-

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A luminous tale about the secrets that even the closest families keep from each other.

"Splendid...A ringing affirmation of modern life" –PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

"A richly satisfying novel" –KIRKUS REVIEWS

"A graceful writer, Graham Swift is also an astute observer of these seemingly ordinary but all-important moments as well as a master at creating characters who seem to us as complicated, contradictory and utterly recognizable as people we know." –Francine Prose, PEOPLE

"Compulsively compelling" –ESQUIRE

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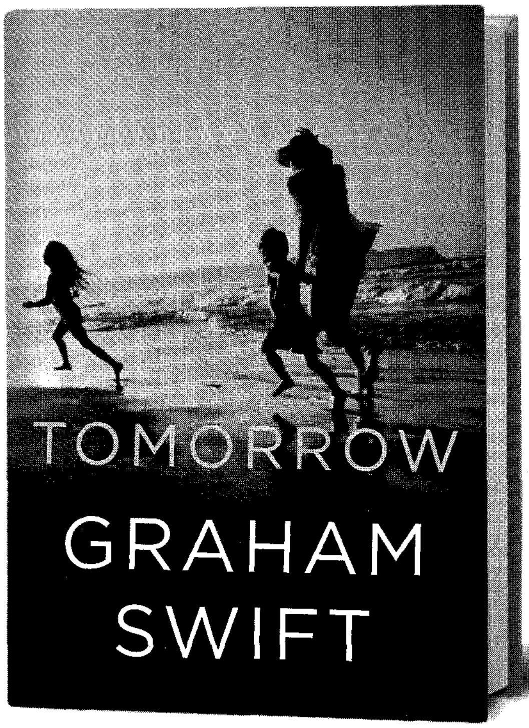


gish indulgence of the preceding couple of hours. The film dies long before Jesse James does; such liveliness as there is springs from the subplots and bit parts—notably from Paul Schneider as Dick Liddil, a much better Lothario than he was an outlaw. Photographed, to the hilt, by Roger Deakins.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/1/07.) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

THE BRAVE ONE

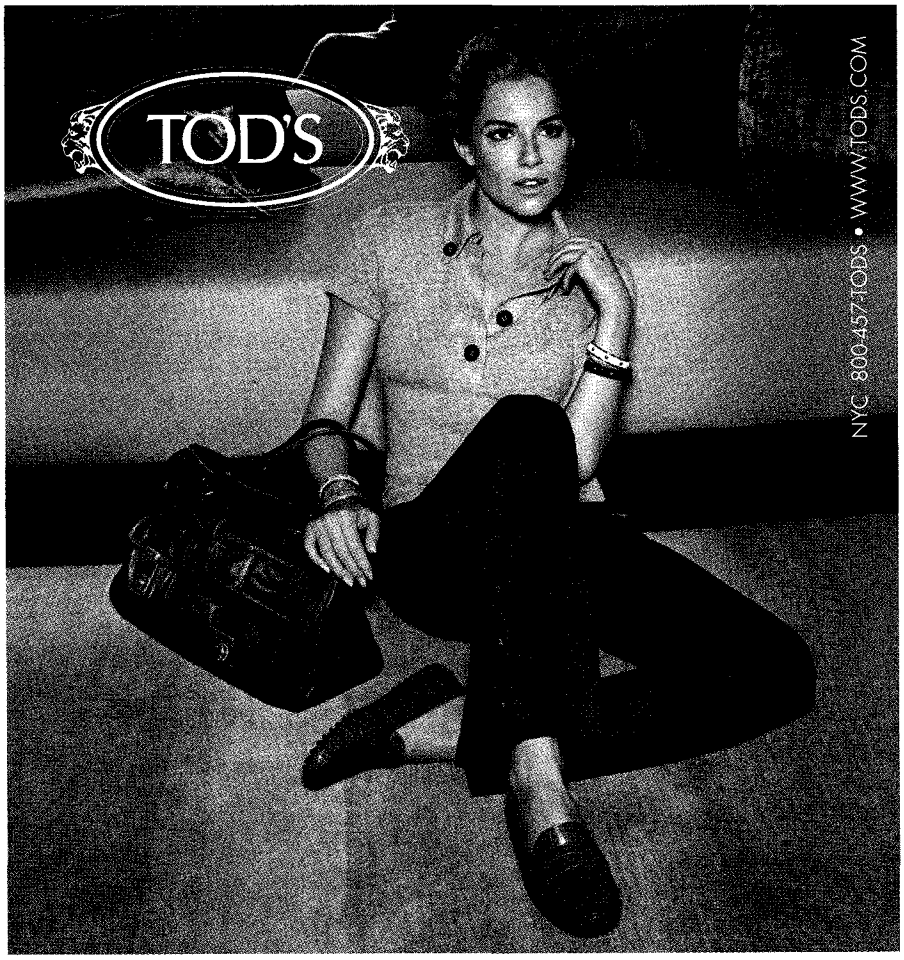
The director Neil Jordan's ambitious attempt to renew the urban-vigilante genre sags under an unsupported burden of imposed moral and political significance. Erica Bain (Jodie Foster), the on-air host of a daily radio paean to New York street life, slowly recovers from a brutal Central Park mugging that left her in a three-week coma and her fiancé dead. Frustrated by the law's methodical workings, she buys an illegal handgun. One night, confronted by a convenience-store gunman, she blows him away and discovers she likes it, then stalks the city in search of other evildoers. In depicting the pleasures of revenge, Jordan wants to expose its moral and psychological price. Indeed, he writes his message large, turning the story into a supercilious post-9/11 allegory: the crime took place on June 11th; a voice-over cites D. H. Lawrence's definition of the "essential American soul" as a "killer"; another character asks, "Hasn't the whole Iraqi debacle taught us anything?"; and a victim of collateral damage from Erica's shooting of a self-proclaimed suicide attacker asks, "Is this still America?" The script cuts its characters down to fit its politics, and Jordan's bleary, cramped direction strips the flavor from his New York locations: it might as well be Omaha.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

EASTERN PROMISES

The new David Cronenberg film, set among Russian mobsters in London, stars Viggo Mortensen as Nikolai, a part-time chauffeur and full-time threat. He takes care of business for Semyon (Armin Mueller-Stahl), a soft-spoken restaurateur with frightening blue eyes, and Semyon's whining son (Vincent Cassel). Into this murk comes Anna (Naomi Watts), a midwife who is trying to trace the family of an orphaned Russian child. What Cronenberg and his screenwriter, Steve Knight, want to engineer is a collision between worlds that have nothing—no social habits or moral norms—in common. The result, despite the modern setting, is a strangely old-fashioned fable, with a redeeming innocent thrown among evil men. There is no denying the momentum of the story, or Mortensen's shade-wearing composure, but some of the casting (Cassel especially) is askew, and the tone keeps lurching from the sombre into the ghastly as Cronenberg strives to maintain his reputation as a master bloodletter. You may need to look away. With the compelling, cadaverous Donald Sumpter (last seen in "The Constant Gardener") as an English cop.—*A.L.* (9/17/07) (In wide release.)

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOON

This seems like the right time to make a documentary about the Apollo space program. There is a new generation of filmgoers for whom it feels like ancient history, verging on the irrelevant; in which case they require immediate instruction. Moreover, the surviving astronauts are now in their seventies, and thus able to reflect on their achievements with an ease and a modesty that render them more approachable than their younger, superhuman selves. The director, David Sington, interviews most of them (but not the reclusive Neil Armstrong), interspersing their contributions with original NASA footage and steering clear of dramatic reconstruction. Philip Sheppard's accompanying score is, as so often with tales of the extraterrestrial, more strident than is necessary; the feats of men like Michael Collins and Alan Bean (to name the two most affable souls on show) need no musical boost. Produced by Ron Howard.—*A.L.* (9/17/07) (Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.)



IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH

The deadpan American hipster Tommy Lee Jones gives the performance of a lifetime in this sombre but fascinating movie, playing a former Army man, Hank Deerfield, whose son, Mike (Jonathan Tucker), after serving in Iraq, has gone AWOL in America. When the young man's body turns up, burned and dismembered, near a base in New Mexico, Hank joins forces with a local police detective (Charlize Theron) to find out what happened. The picture, written and directed by Paul Haggis, is a detailed police procedural encasing a technological and metaphysical lunge at the truth. As Hank looks for Mike's killers, he also tries to interpret the fragmented war scenes that his son recorded on his camera phone. The emotional center is the bond between two generations of warriors—Hank's fear that his son has gone feral, and Mike's anguished attempt to communicate what has happened to him through pictures. The tone of the film is wounded and ambiguous; it's the very opposite of a tearjerker. With Susan Sarandon, as Hank's wife, and Jason Patric, as an Army investigator. The muted cinematography is by Roger Deakins. Based on an actual case—the death of specialist Richard Davis, in 2003, as reported by Mark Boal in a *Playboy* article published in May, 2004.—*David Denby* (9/24/07) (In limited release.)

INTO THE WILD

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In limited release.)

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

A smooth-as-silk adaptation of the best-seller by Karen Joy Fowler, about members of a reading group in Sacramento whose lives mirror the various characters from Jane Austen novels. The writer and director, Robin Swicord, carefully shuffles the romantic problems (unrequited love, loneliness, infidelity) of the film's main characters (played by Emily Blunt, Kathy Baker, Hugh Dancy, and the great Maria Bello, among others) to an orderly, if unsurprising, conclusion. And, while nobody's plight seems insurmountable, the story is presented with such a glossy finish that it's difficult not to be amused by all the Austen-and-the-City reflections.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE KINGDOM

After a murderous attack on an American compound in Riyadh, a covert team of F.B.I. agents—Jamie Foxx, Jennifer Garner, Chris Cooper, and Jason Bateman—is flown in, against the wishes of the State Department, to explore the crime. There are severe restrictions on their activities in Saudi Arabia, although, thanks to the cunning of the writer, Matthew Michael Carnahan, and the director, Peter Berg, these are quietly lifted, allowing our heroes to round off the movie in a noisy blaze of firepower. Berg shows his skill at orchestrating these brassy scenes, so much so that you almost forget the absurdities of the plot (was it wise to send a female forensic scientist to a Muslim country?) and almost forgive the hard-nosed vengefulness of the whole enterprise. Wait for the final line: it's clever and loaded, and it makes the movie seem far more poised and pensive than it actually was. With a fine performance by Ashraf Barhom as the Saudi investigator.—*A.L.* (10/1/07) (In wide release.)

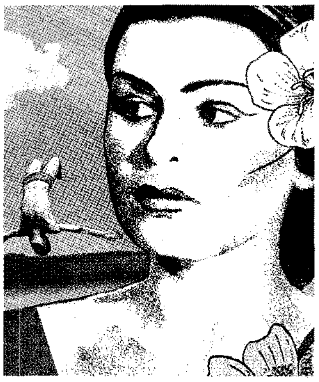
THE LAST MISTRESS

With the director Catherine Breillat, you know you'll get sex and pain; her period adaptation of an 1851 novel by Barbey d'Aurevilly delivers them with such style and conviction that the familiar theme becomes new again. A young Parisian nobleman, Ryno de Marigny (Fu'ad Aït Aattou), is about to marry the virginal Hermangarde de Polastron (Roxane Mesquida) despite his notorious ten-year affair with a cigar-smoking Spanish spitfire, Vellini (Asia Argento), a drawing-room Carmen who pursues her prey with ruthless audacity. In the kind of performance that is routinely called daring, Argento lets loose earsplitting screams and throws her naked body around with abandon, but she does the real work quietly, with smoldering stares and chilling whispers of mad intent. Breillat lends the entire cast of characters delicately declamatory manners that fit the refined depravity of their milieu, and she frames them in subtly sculptural images to match. From a knife blade to a broken

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ONLY THE LONELY

"Summer Interlude," from 1951, was Ingmar Bergman's tenth film as a director, but perhaps the first in which his characteristic themes, visual motifs, and emotional intensity reached their full power. The heroine, a ballet dancer (Maj-Britt Nilsson) who lives in Stockholm, is emotionally bereft at twenty-eight. During a half-day break in rehearsals, she goes to a resort island where, thirteen years earlier, she had a love affair with a student (Birger Malmsten). Bergman re-creates the brief, much adored Swedish summer with an ecstasy that is underlined by the certainty of loss—Death, appearing as a frightening old woman who plays chess with a clergyman, makes an early appearance. The movie has a couple of Bergman howlers (such as a noisy owl that presages doom), but its evocation of first love and the long disillusion that follows is possibly without equal in movies, and the relief from melancholy—through dancing, theatre, the masks that reveal the self—builds into an overwhelming accession of bliss. Playing at Moving Image on Oct. 6.

—*David Denby*



TARA HARDY

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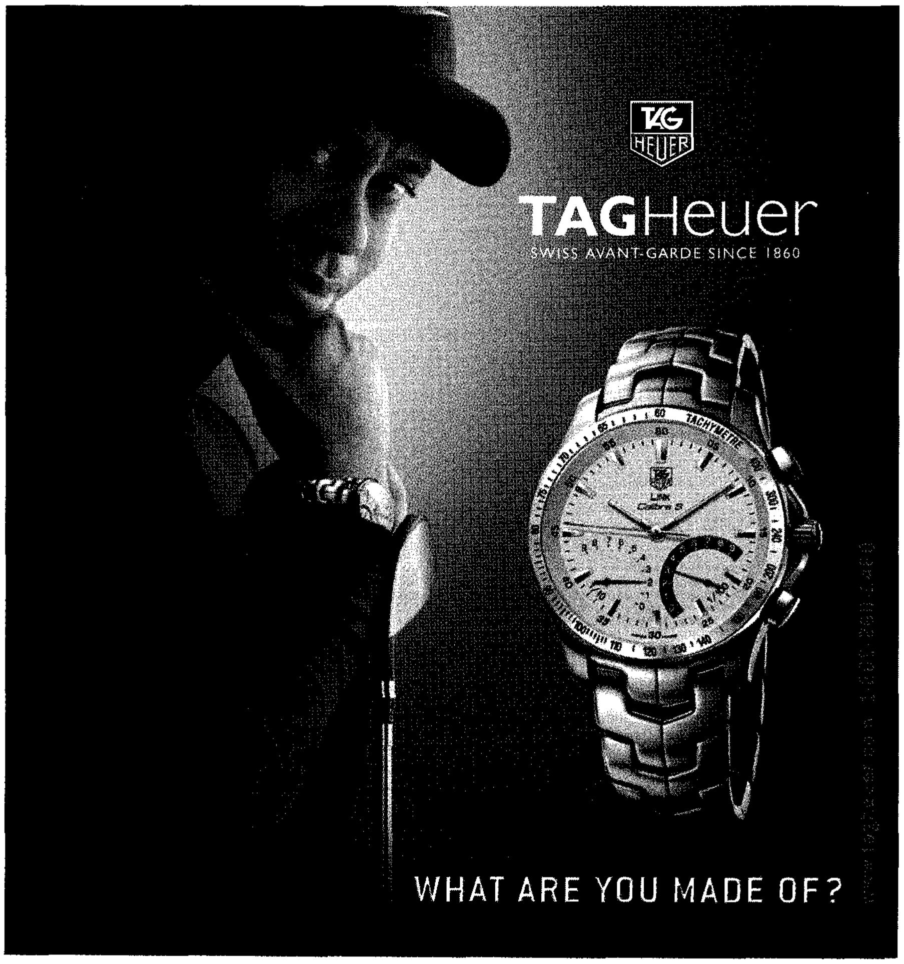
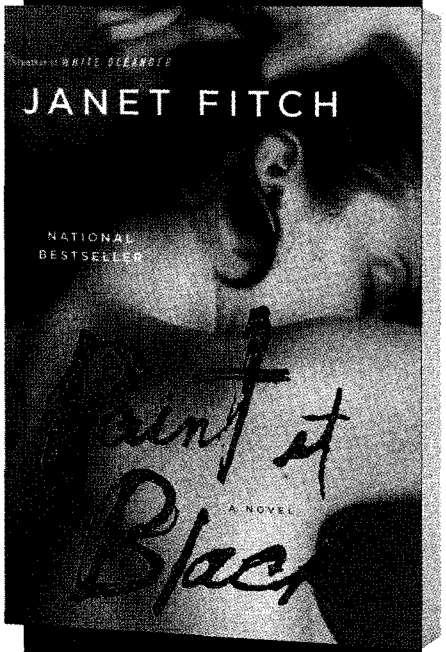


The "riveting"*

New York Times

bestseller by the author

of *White Oleander*



The emotionally charged story of two women—a young runaway and a world renowned pianist—thrust together by the loss of a man they both loved.

"A dark, crafted beauty that fulfills all the promise of *White Oleander* and confirms that Janet Fitch is an artist of the very highest order."

—Nina Revoyr, *LOS ANGELES TIMES BOOK REVIEW*

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—*ATLANTIC MONTHLY*

"This is crackling stuff you don't read every day."

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glass, from a bullet to a gynecological ordeal, bloodshed saturates the taut dramatic fabric and suggests the destructive power of an obsession that owes little to pleasure. With Michael Lonsdale and Yolande Moreau as a chorus of elders who get caught up in the tumult. In French.—*R.B.* (New York Film Festival; Oct. 7-8.)

LUST, CAUTION
The beautiful stone buildings and mahogany interiors of post-colonial Shanghai cast a heavy, voluptuous spell in Ang Lee's adaptation of Eileen Chang's story of sex and espionage in the wartime city. Tang Wei, a former model and a prodigious young actress, plays a member of a political-theatre group that carries its playacting into active resistance to the Japanese occupation. Pretending to be a married sophisticate, the girl enters the circle of Mr. Yee (Tony Leung), a high-placed Chinese collaborator and nemesis of the resistance, and finds herself both attracted to and repelled by him. Ang Lee's staging of the bruising erotic scenes is incomparably powerful, but the meetings and actions of the resistance (presumably under Communist Party discipline) are not very convincing. The movie dawdles and repeats itself unconscionably—it lacks drive and, except for the sex scenes, a tinge of wildness. Shot by Rodrigo Prieto on sets constructed in Shanghai. Wang Hui-Ling and James Schamus wrote the screenplay. In Mandarin.—*D.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

STRANGE CULTURE
Lynn Hershman-Leeson directed this intriguing documentary, about the Buffalo-based artist Steve Kurtz, who was accused of bioterrorism in 2004, when his wife, Hope, died suddenly at the age of forty-five and police, responding to the emergency call, discovered biological materials in his home. In reënactments, Thomas Jay Ryan and Tilda Swinton portray the Kurtzes, who, at the time of Hope's death, were making an art piece addressing the lucrative collusion of the government, science, and industry in the mass production of genetically modified foods. The cops called in the F.B.I.; when Arabic writing (on an invitation to the upcoming art show) was found, along with lab equipment and petri dishes of bacteria (which Kurtz had ordered on the Internet and which he proved were harmless by licking one in front of an agent), he was put under detention. Interviews with the gentle Kurtz himself (who still awaits trial, now only for mail and wire fraud) provide valuable context for this study in First Amendment rights, which underscores the confusion, overreaching desperation, and general cluelessness of the government's response to 9/11.—*Shauna Lyon* (Cinema Village.)

TRADE
A global human-trafficking ring is at the center of Marco Kreuzpaintner's sensationalistic melodrama. In Mexico City, a young thug named Jorge (Cesar Ramos) discovers that his thirteen-year-old sister (Paulina Gaitan) has been abducted, along with a Polish beauty (Alicja Bachleda-Curus) and several other victims. Jorge trails the kidnappers to the U.S. border, and eventually Kevin Kline shows up, as Ray, an emotionally wounded Texas cop who seems to be searching for something. The salacious details of the horrific captivity, crossed with the high-gloss cinematography and Jorge and Ray's buddy-movie-style road trip, make this film, about a real and frightening subject, feel trivial.—*S.L.* (In wide release.)

UNDERWORLD
Ben Hecht, who wrote the story and won an Oscar for it in 1927, objected to the way the director, Josef von Sternberg, embellished his characters with flamboyant touches, but the fusion of Hecht's hard-boiled guys and molls and von Sternberg's otherworldly atmospherics makes this gangland tale of competing loyalties wonderfully entertaining. George Bancroft plays the crude but lionhearted bank robber Bull Weed; Evelyn Brent vamps her way through the role of his girl, Feathers McCoy; and Clive Brook achieves a glittering subtlety as Rolls Royce, the alcoholic lawyer Bull rescues from the gutter and makes his right-hand man. When Bull gets sent away for murdering his criminal rival Buck Mulligan (Fred Kohler) after he assaulted Feathers, she and Rolls Royce must fight their romantic impulses. There are some perfect scenes, such as an underworld ball that ends with tuxedoed thugs trudging through drifts of party paper. All gangster films have stolen something from this one, whether it's the billboard telling the antiheroes "The City Is Yours" or the shoot-out that shatters the bricks of Bull Weed's hideout.—*Michael Sragow* (New York Film Festival; Oct. 4.)

Also Playing

THE DARJEELING LIMITED: Lincoln Square and Union Square. **FEAST OF LOVE:** In wide release. **THE PRICE OF SUGAR:** Cinema Village. **THE RAPE OF EUROPA:** Angelika Film Center and Paris. **SYDNEY WHITE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"The Walking Picture Palace," programs curated by Mark McElhatten. Oct. 4 at 7: "A Darkness Swallowed" (2005, Betzy Bromberg) and a performance for multiple projectors by Bruce McClure. ♦ Oct. 4 at 9:30: Short films by Fred Worden. ♦ Oct. 8 at 7: Short films by Michael Robinson, introduced by the filmmaker. ♦ Oct. 8 at 9: "Foggy Mountains Breakdown More Than Non-Foggy Mountains" (2006, Jesse Stead), introduced by the filmmaker. ♦ Oct. 9 at 7: Short films by Phil Solomon, introduced by the filmmaker. ♦ Oct. 9 at 9:15: Mark Lapore tribute program.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Mikhail Kalatozov. Except where noted, all films are in Russian. Oct. 3 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15, Oct. 4 at 7:30 and 9:30, Oct. 5-7 and Oct. 9 at 4:30 and 9:15, and Oct. 8 at 6:50: "The Cranes Are Flying" (1957). ♦ Oct. 5-7 at 2 and 6:50, Oct. 8 at 4:30 and 9:15, and Oct. 9 at 6:50: "The Letter Never Sent" (1950). ♦ Special screening. "Art21," a PBS series. Oct. 6 at 12:30: "Romance" (2007, Catherine Tatge and Charles Atlas), followed by a Q. & A. with the artist Laurie Simmons.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Oct. 3-9 at 1:40, 4:20, 7, and 9:30: "The 400 Blows" (1959, François Truffaut; in French) and "Antoine and Colette" (1962, Truffaut; in French).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Oct. 30: "Alexandre Desplat: A Visionary Composer." Oct. 9 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "A Hell of a Day" (2001, Marion Vernoux; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Special screening. Oct. 4 at 7:30: "The Orchestra of Piazza Vittorio" (2006, Agostino Ferrente; in Italian), with a live music performance. ♦ In revival. Oct. 5-8 at noon: "The Earrings of Madame de . . ." (1953, Max Ophüls; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Oct. 5-7: "Blue Velvet" (1986, David Lynch). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Oct. 9 at 7:30: "A Table in Heaven" (2007, Andrew Rossi).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through Oct. 15: The films of Michael Haneke. Except where noted, all films are in German. Oct. 3 at 6:15: "Lemmings, Part 1: Arcadia" (1979). ♦ Oct. 3 at 8:30: "Lemmings, Part 2: Injuries" (1979). ♦ Oct. 4 at 6:15: "Variation" (1983). ♦ Oct. 4 at 8:30: "Who Was Edgar Allan?" (1984). ♦ Oct. 5 at 6:15: "The Seventh Continent" (1989; in German, French, and English). ♦ Oct. 5 at 8:30 and Oct. 7 at 2: "71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance" (1994; in German and Romanian). ♦ Oct. 6 at 2: "Fraulein" (1986). ♦ Oct. 6 at 4:15: "The Rebellion" (1993). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6:15: "The Castle" (1997). ♦ Oct. 6 at 8:45: "Benny's Video" (1992; in German, English, Arabic, and French). ♦ Oct. 7 at 4: "Code Un-

known" (2000; in various languages). ♦ Oct. 7 at 6:30: "The Piano Teacher" (2001; in French). ♦ Oct. 8 at 6:15: "Time of the Wolf" (2003; in French). ♦ Oct. 8 at 8:45: "Caché" (2005; in French). ♦ The films of Pere Portabella. Except where noted, all films are in Spanish. ♦ Oct. 3 at 6:30: "General Report on Some Interesting Facts for a Public Showing" (1976; in Spanish, Catalan, and Euskera). ♦ Oct. 4 at 6: Films about the artist Joan Miró (1969-74). ♦ Oct. 4 at 8: "Nocturno 29" (1968) and "Don't Count on Your Fingers" (1967). ♦ Oct. 5 at 6:15: "Warsaw Bridge" (1990; in Spanish and Catalan). ♦ Oct. 5 at 8:15: "The Silence Before Bach" (2007; in Spanish and German). ♦ Oct. 6 at 2: "El Sopar" (1974). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6: "Vampire Cuadecuc" (1970) and "Playback" (1970). ♦ Oct. 6 at 8: "Umbracle" (1972). ♦ Oct. 7 at 2:30 and Oct. 8 at 4:30: "Apocalypse Now Redux" (1979/2001, Francis Ford Coppola).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Preview screening. Oct. 3 at 7: "Sleuth" (2007, Kenneth Branagh), introduced by Michael Caine and the director. Screening to be held at Chelsea West Cinemas, 333 W. 23rd St. (For ticket information, call 718-784-4520.) ♦ Films directed or chosen by Arnaud Desplechin. Oct. 6 at 3: "Esther Kahn" (2000). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6: "Summer Interlude" (1951, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Oct. 7 at 3: "My Sex Life . . . or How I Got Into an Argument" (1966). ♦ Oct. 7 at 6:30: "Two English Girls" (1971, François Truffaut; in French and English).

NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Films are screened at a variety of theatres; for program information, visit www.filmlinc.com. Oct. 3 at 6: "The Man from London" (2007, Béla Tarr; in Hungarian). ♦ Oct. 3 at 6:45 and Oct. 5 at 5 and 9:20: "Macunaima" (1969, Joaquim de Andrade; in Portuguese). Oct. 3 at 9:10 and Oct. 5 at 7:20: "The Conspirators" (1972, Pedro de Andrade; in Portuguese). ♦ Oct. 3 at 9:15: "Stellet Licht" (2007, Carlos Reygadas; in Plattdeutsch). ♦ Oct. 4 at 6 and 8:30: "Underworld" (†). ♦ Oct. 4 at 6 and Oct. 6 at 1:15: "Alexandra" (2007, Alexander Sokurov; in Russian). ♦ Oct. 4 at 8:30 and Oct. 6 at 10 A.M.: "I'm Not There" (2007, Todd Haynes). ♦ Oct. 5 at midnight and Oct. 7 at 4:15: "Go Go Tales" (2007, Abel Ferrara). ♦ Oct. 6 at 3:45: "In the City of Sylvia" (2007, José Luis Guerín; in French and Spanish). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6: "The Axe in the Attic" (2007, Ed Pincus and Lucia Small). ♦ Oct. 6 at 9 and Oct. 7 at 10 A.M.: "No Country for Old Men" (2007, Joel and Ethan Coen). ♦ Oct. 7 at 1 and Oct. 8 at 9: "Flight of the Red Balloon" (2007, Hou Hsiao-Hsien; in French). ♦ Oct. 7 at 7 and Oct. 8 at 12:30: "Margot at the Wedding" (2007, Noah Baumbach). ♦ Oct. 7 at 9:30 and Oct. 8 at 6: "The Last Mistress" (†). ♦ Oct. 8 at 3 and Oct. 9 at 9:15: "Paranoid Park" (2007, Gus Van Sant). ♦ Oct. 9 at 6 and Oct. 10 at 8:45: "I Just Didn't Do It" (2007, Masayuki Suo; in Japanese).

PIONEER THEATRE

155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Oct. 3-13 (call for showtimes): "Jack Ketchum's The Girl Next Door" (2007, Gregory M. Wilson).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

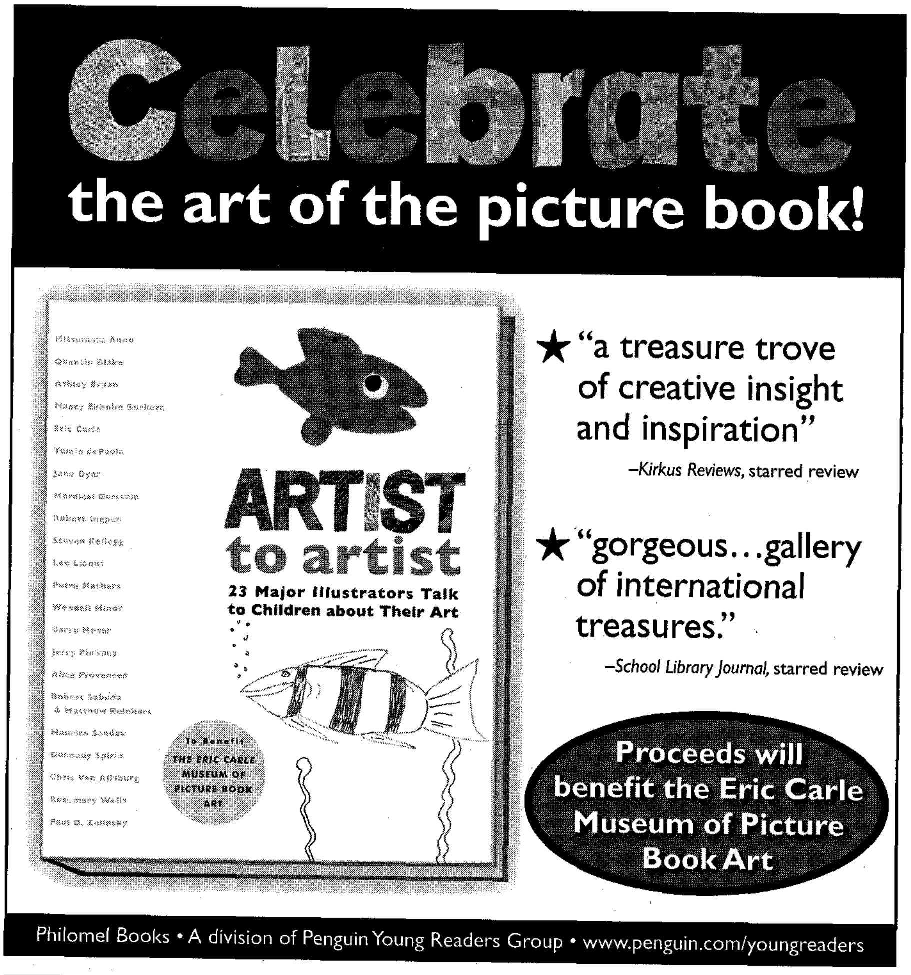
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—South Asian International Film Festival. For complete program information, visit www.saiff.org. Oct. 5 at 9:45: "Shame" (2006, Mohammed Naqvi; in Urdu and Siraiki). ♦ Oct. 6 at 7:45: "Q2P" (2006, Paromita Vohra). ♦ Oct. 8 at 3:15: "Pakistan Zindabad" (2007, Pascale Lamche; in French).

SCANDINAVIA HOUSE

58 Park Ave., at 38th St. (212-847-9779)—Through Dec. 15: "A Celebration of Danish Cinema: Nordisk Film at 100." Oct. 3 at 6:30 and Oct. 6 at 3: "The Melody of Murder" (1944, Bodil Ipsen; in Danish).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"John Sayles's Personal Choice." Oct. 7 at 7:30: "Panic in the Streets" (1950, Elia Kazan). ♦ Oct. 9 at 7:30: "Fat City" (1972, John Huston).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READINGS AND TALKS

ADRIAN TOMINE
The artist and illustrator discusses his new graphic novel, "Shortcomings," with Nicole Rudick, the managing editor of *Bookforum*. (BookCourt, 163 Court St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. Oct. 3 at 7.)

DAWN LUNDY MARTIN
The recipient of the 2006 Cave Canem Poetry Prize reads from her winning collection, "A Gathering of Matter/A Matter of Gathering." She'll be joined by the poet Carl Phillips, who judged the competition, and two of the finalists, Sean Hill and Nadia Nurhussein. (Hemmerdinger Hall, Silver Center, New York University, 100 Washington Sq. E. No tickets necessary. Oct. 4 at 7:30.)

DEREK WALCOTT
The Nobel Prize-winning poet visits the Italian Cultural Institute. (Park Ave. at 68th St. Oct. 5 at 6. For reservations, which are required, call 212-879-4242, ext. 375.)

RALPH BRANCA
The Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher, who in 1951 infamously served up the ball that Bobby Thompson hit out of the Polo Grounds to help deliver the pennant to the New York Giants, talks with Joshua Prager, whose book, "The Echoing Green: Ralph Branca, Bobby Thompson and the Shot Heard Round the World," revealed the "technical assistance" the Giants had been giving themselves with a telescope in their clubhouse. (Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. For reservations, which are required, call 212-534-1672, ext. 3395. Oct. 9 at 6:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE NEW YORKER FESTIVAL
The eighth annual gathering of contributors to the magazine takes place Oct. 5-7. Many events are sold out, but, as of press time, others still have tickets available. A partial list follows. Oct. 6 at 1: The magazine's dance critic, Joan Acocella, interviews the choreographer Matthew Bourne. (Cedar Lake Dance Studios, 547 W. 26th St.) Oct. 6 at 2: The pop-music critic Sasha Frere-Jones discourses on "What *Isn't* Hip-Hop?" (Ailey Citigroup Theatre, Joan Weill Center for Dance, 405 W. 55th St.) Oct. 6 at 7:30: Hendrik Hertzberg talks with the singer-songwriter Rosanne Cash, who will also perform. (Highline Ballroom, 431 W. 16th St.) (For a complete schedule, visit festival.newyorker.com.)

"SHOCKED! SHOCKED!"
This daylong symposium, which is subtitled "Just How Many Times Can a Country Lose Its Innocence?," takes a high-minded look at some of the historical lows in the history of the United States (and other nations), including the urban riots of the sixties, the Vietnam War, the Iran-Contra scandal, and sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. The law professor and writer Annette Gordon-Reed will consider the Thomas Jefferson–Sally Hemings connection, the graphic artist Art Spiegelman will address "Peanuts" and comic-strip culture, and the documentary filmmaker Errol Morris will focus on the abuses at Abu Ghraib. Many other academics and writers will participate, including the literary critic Richard Halpern, whose book "Norman Rockwell: The Dark Side of Innocence" helped prompt Lawrence Weschler, the director of the New York Institute for the Humanities, at New York University, to organize the event. (Cantor Film Center, N.Y.U., 26 E. 8th St. Oct. 6, starting at 11. For more information, call 212-998-2100.)

OPEN HOUSE NEW YORK
This annual event affords access to some two hundred sites of architectural and cultural significance. (Oct. 6-7. For details, visit www.ohny.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
This week the auction houses turn their focus to Yankee craftsmanship and imagination. Along with such prized lots as a delicate early Queen Anne mahogany tea table (made in Boston) and a massive 1680 joined oak cupboard, **Sotheby's** sale of Americana (Oct. 4) features a very special collection, the late Charlotte Dinger's assemblage of beautifully rendered carousel figures. This sale is followed by one of ornithological works from the collection of the late Brooks McCormick (Oct. 5), including a large selection of Audubon engravings. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** large sale of Americana (Oct. 3) features a mahogany tea table with carvings attributed to the anonymous but renowned "Garvan" carver, known for the boldness and clarity of his designs, and a significant group of works from the Atwater Kent Museum, in Philadelphia. After an auction of Old Master paintings on Oct. 4, the human body takes center stage on Oct. 5, when the collection of anatomy books of the "media doctor" and radio host Dean Edell goes up for sale. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Swann** presents a sale on Oct. 4 of African-American art from the collection of the Los Angeles-based Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, a distinguished African-American-owned insurance firm. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

"The Wild, Wild Rose," at the New York Film Festival.

JOSE LUIS MERINO

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
DISORIENTED
Oct. 10–16

In the nineteen-fifties, the Hong Kong cinema got a bracing dose of modernity thanks to the advanced tastes of the producer Loke Wan Tho, who headed Cathay Studios. Such films as "Mambo Girl," "Our Dream Car," and "The Wild, Wild Rose" showed modern economics and mores in conflict with traditional values. A week's worth of Cathay's films will be on view in a New York Film Festival sidebar. (212-875-5050.)

NIGHT LIFE
FAST LANE
Oct. 26

The vocalist Rachel Nagy—a former butcher and stripper—and the guitarist Mary Ramirez bring the Detroit Cobras, a Motor City garage act that soups up old soul and girl-group numbers, to the Mercury Lounge. (212-260-4700.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
TRIPLE PLAY
Oct. 27

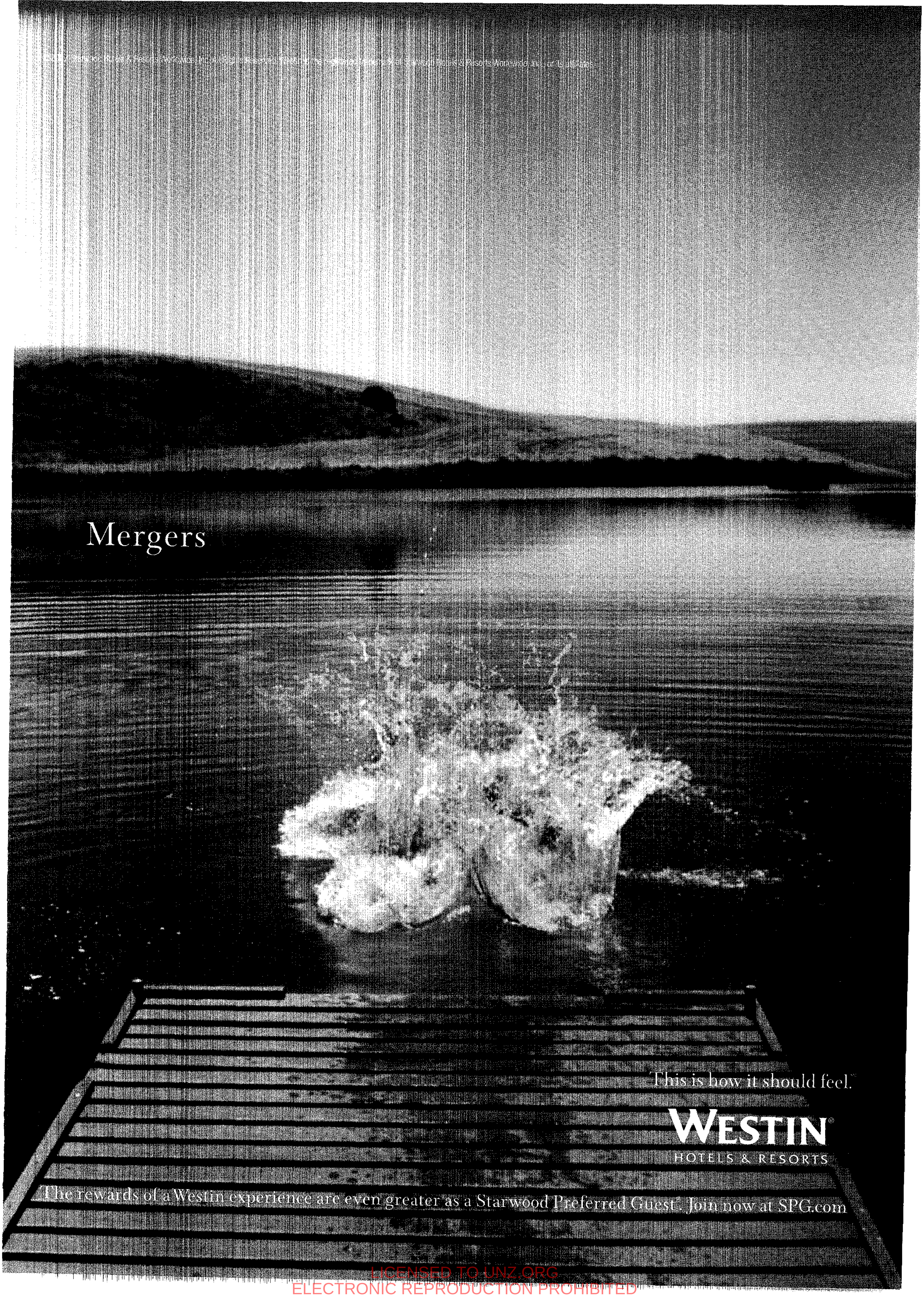
It may be hard to imagine the names Itzhak Perlman and Steve Reich in the same sentence, but the inaugural concert of the violinist's new series at the Metropolitan Museum will feature Perlman and several of his young protégés performing a program that features Reich's fascinating Triple Quartet, along with music by Tchaikovsky and Mozart. (212-570-3949.)

THE THEATRE
FAMILY DYNAMICS
Oct. 30

Tracy Letts, an actor in the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble whose playwriting credits include "Bug," has his Broadway début as a writer with "August: Osage County," at the Imperial Theatre. The comic drama portrays a dysfunctional Kansas family whose matriarch has cancer. (212-239-6200.)

ART
THE WOODSMAN
Nov. 4–Jan. 14, 2008

Stone, tar, wire, and metal have all graced Martin Puryear's sculpture, but he's best known for his lyrical use of wood. His thirty-year survey at the Museum of Modern Art will give pride of place—the second-floor atrium—to a new work involving a fifty-foot-tall tree trunk. (212-708-9400.)



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THE WAR

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THE WAR

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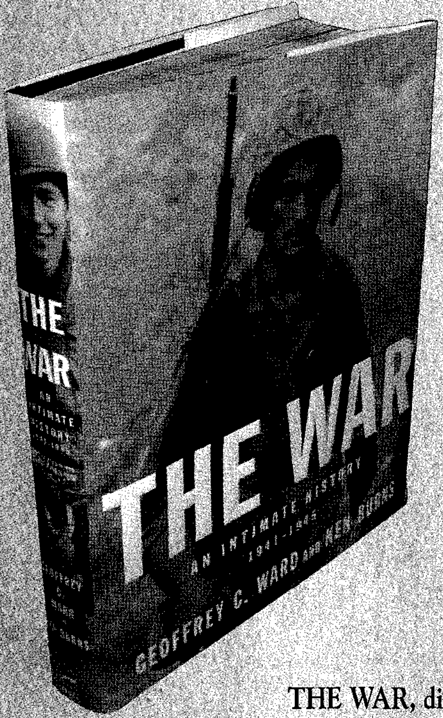

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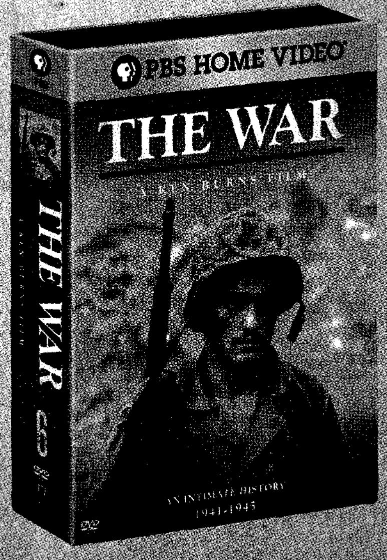

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THE
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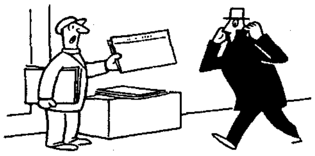
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
DISPARITIES



Just over a year ago, during a high-school assembly in Jena, Louisiana, a black student asked the school's white principal if it would be all right to sit under an oak tree outside, an oasis of shade known as the "white tree," because only Caucasian students congregated there. The principal said that the young man could sit where he liked. Later, the student and some African-American friends walked over to the oak and chatted with some white schoolmates. The next day, somebody fixed two nooses to the tree's branches.

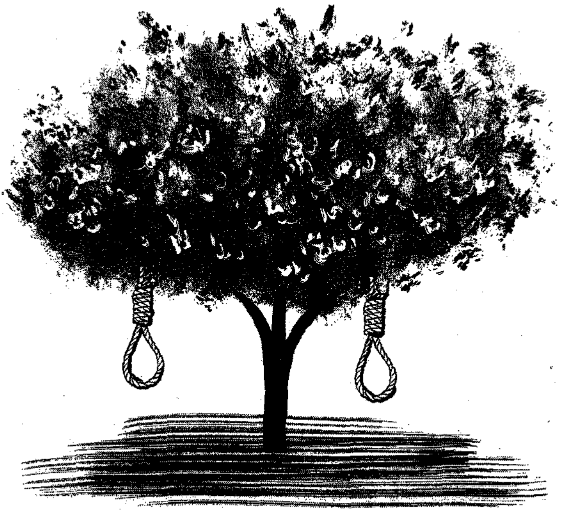
The ropes inaugurated a narrative of conflict and small-town justice in the Deep South known today as the case of the Jena Six, a story populated by a disconcerting number of stock characters from the late Jim Crow era. Its origins signalled a theatrical quality that a swelling cast, including the Reverend Al Sharpton, has managed to sustain; an Off Broadway production (backlit oak tree, gentle wind machines, soliloquies about past and present) seems inevitable.

Although some of the evidence in the Jena case is murky, a cumulative verdict of racial double standards lies beyond reasonable doubt. Between Reconstruction and the end of the Second World War, more than two hundred and fifty people in Louisiana, the great majority of them African-Americans, were lynched. Jena's recent noosemakers, identified as a trio of white students, were recommended for expulsion by the principal, who was evidently conscious of this history, but a white school superintendent imposed suspensions only, on the ground that the tree display was a prank. In the days leading up to that decision, fights had erupted between black and white students, and the local district attorney, Reed Walters, reportedly gave a speech in which he warned students, "With a stroke of my pen, I can make your lives disappear."

Last December, at the school, a black student coldcocked a white student, Justin Barker, knocking him briefly unconscious; other black students allegedly kicked the victim while he lay on the ground. Barker was treated for cuts and bruises at a hospital and released a few hours later. The police arrested six black students, aged fourteen to eighteen, and Walters charged them with attempted second-degree murder and a conspiracy count; if convicted, they faced up to seventy-five years in prison.

Jena prosecutors started reducing the charges to aggravated second-degree battery and conspiracy. Still, last June an all-white jury convicted one of the defendants, Mychal Bell, who was sixteen years old at the time of the assault, of crimes that threatened him with up to twenty-two years in an adult state prison. Michael Baisden, a black syndicated radio talk-show host who normally specializes in romance and its perils, undertook an on-air protest, along with others, which spread across black radio and then to the Internet. In late September, thousands of demonstrators descended on Jena. Last Thursday, Bell, whose convictions had been thrown out, was released on bail, after ten months in jail; Reed Walters has agreed to retry him as a juvenile.

Last week, in the *Times*, Walters defended his work; he described himself as just "a lawyer obligated to enforce the laws of my state." A devotion to the sanctity of statutes is, of course, essential in a nation governed by laws, but equally important is the exercise of prosecutorial discretion, derived from an intuitive commit-



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

ment to fairness and common sense. If Walters had possessed a modest measure of such judgment, he might have rescued himself and the town of Jena from notoriety many months ago.

His bullheadedness, however, does not explain why Jena's narrative has resonated so broadly. Many African-Americans understand the case not only as the civil-rights era redux but as a stark illustration of a here-and-now problem, one about which whites are mainly silent: the mass incarceration of black youths—America's "school-to-prison pipeline," as some scholars have christened it.

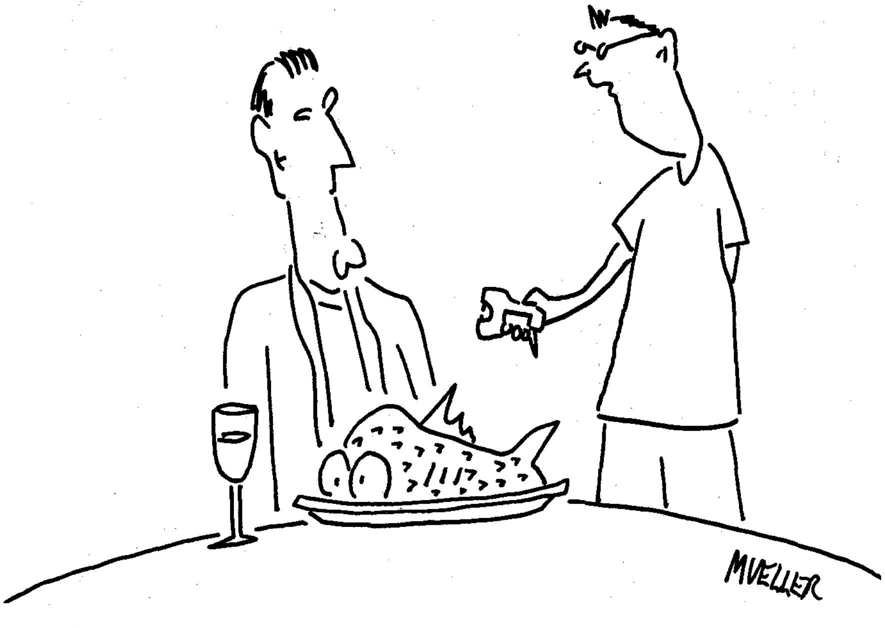
The number of blacks in prison has quadrupled since 1980. There are many overlapping causes, among them severe automated federal sentencing rules; a passionate but badly managed "war on drugs" prosecuted most heavily in African-American neighborhoods; and deepening inequalities in personal income and access to education, whose effects fall hardest on urban teen-agers. One study estimates that, if recent trends continue, a third of the black males born in 2001 can expect to do time.

The state of Louisiana, true to its reputation for rococo extremism in all matters political, locks up in prison a higher percentage of its population—black, white, and all other races combined—than any other state in the nation. It might be of some comfort to politicians, then, if the Jena case, like the disgraceful treatment of displaced African-American victims of Hurricane Katrina, could be rationalized as an isolated, swamp-inspired exception to a more temperate American norm.

The opposite is true, however. In July, the Sentencing Project, a research and advocacy group, released a state-by-state study of prison populations that identified where blacks endured the highest rates of incarceration. The top four states were South Dakota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Vermont; the top ten included Utah, Montana, and Colorado—not places renowned for their African-American subcultures. In the United States today, driving while black—or shoplifting while black, or taking illegal drugs, or hitting schoolmates—often carries the greatest risk of incarceration, in comparison to the risk faced by whites, in states where people of color are rare, including a few states that are liberal, prosperous, and not a little self-satisfied. Ex-slave states that are relatively poor and have large African-American populations, such as Louisiana, display less racial disparity.

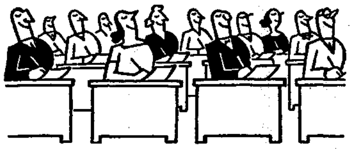
Discrimination in the American justice system is not only a Deep South thing; it is a national embarrassment. Tocqueville, who initially came to America to study its penal system, might wonder how a democracy can so earnestly debate the justice of detaining foreign nationals at Guantánamo while displaying not a whiff of discomfort about the record number of its own citizens—now more than two million—stuffed into jails and prisons, or about the causes of racial disparity in this forgotten population. America's predominant response to racism, of course, has long been denial. In Jena, the town fathers effected a vivid evasion. Their problem, they concluded, was not themselves but their tree: they cut down the offending oak and hauled it away.

—*Steve Coll*



"Taser that for you, sir?"

ON CAMPUS
PREZBO VS. THE PROF



When Lee Bollinger, the president of Columbia University, announced that the school would host a forum featuring President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, the brothers of Pi Kappa Alpha decided to make a sign. "So we pitched around some ideas," one of them said last week, sitting on the stoop of the fraternity house, across the street from Alfred Lerner Hall, where Ahmadinejad had just appeared. A few suggestions seemed off-key: "Come have a beer," "Heidi and Spencer are the real issue," "Bollinger, you really screwed the pooch on this one." The result of their brainstorming session was a bedsheet, draped between two third-story windows and emblazoned with the words "Ahmadinejad is NOT a baller."

Joshua Banker, the fraternity's secretary, was skeptical about Ahmadinejad's performance in the debate. "He emphasized intellectual ideals, but he didn't answer the questions at all," he said. "He kept trying to connect with the university." Banker had a point. A strange facet of the encounter was the way that both participants insisted they were merely humble scholars, shying away, in their rhetoric, from the reaches of geopolitical statecraft in favor of the campus-bound particulars of academe.

Outside, in the Indian-summer brightness, students prepared to watch the proceedings on a Jumbotron. "Need a student to talk to?" Rocky Fishman, in his first year at the business school, asked a reporter. Sheena Shirakhon, a senior, wore a silver bikini top on which she'd written "No" (left breast) "War" (other side). As she was explaining a potential thesis topic,

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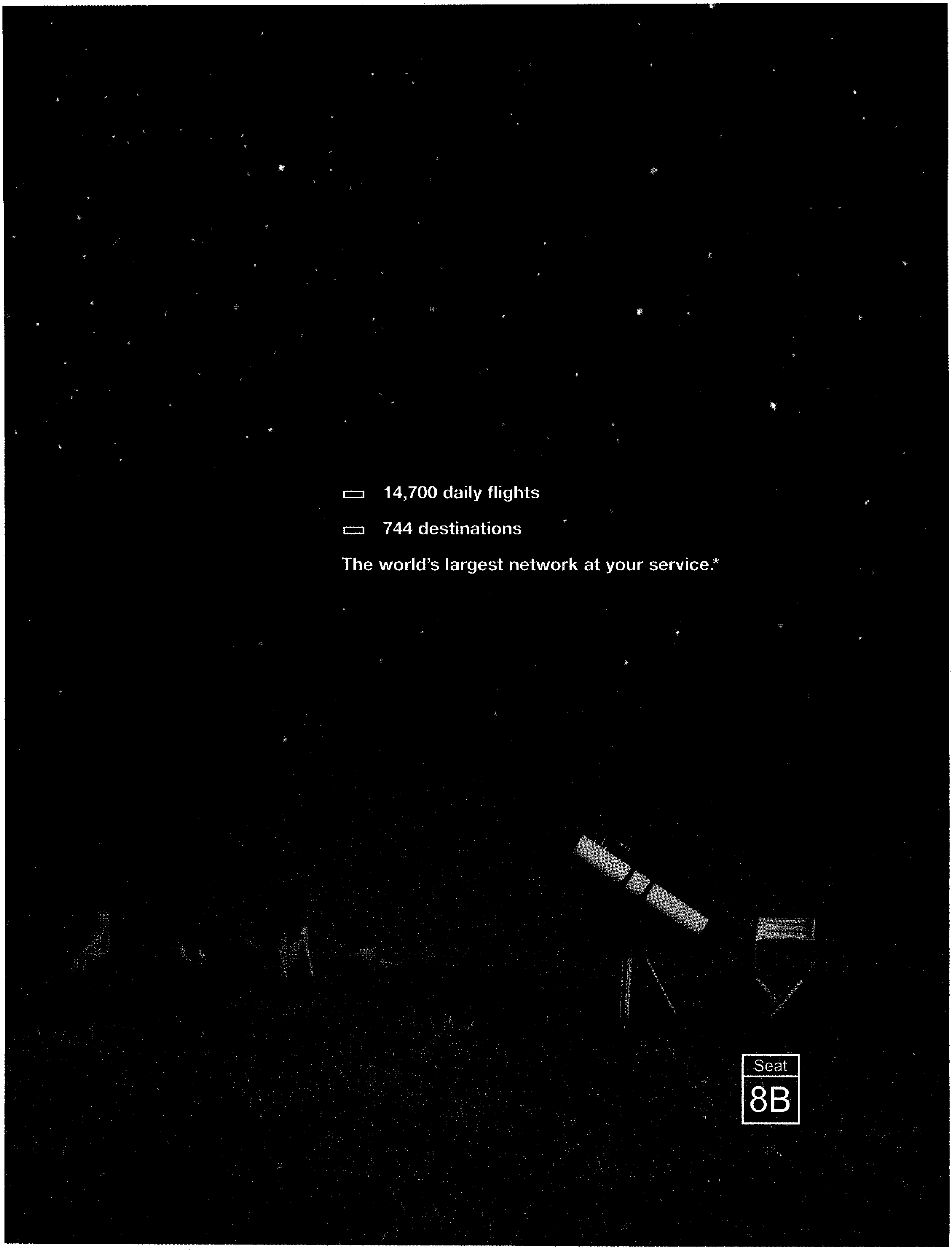
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one of her friends interrupted: “They’re taking pictures of your butt.” (The remainder of Shirakhon’s message—“on Iran”—was printed on her gym shorts.)

Skipping class to attend the forum wasn’t a problem. Anne Prescott, who teaches Shakespeare I at Barnard, wrote in an e-mail to her students, “Do your best to come but also follow your conscience. Remember, I was here in 1968 and can go with the flow, although I’m not sure that flower power, as we then called it, would mean much to the President of Iran.”

As the auditorium filled, Austin Lawrence sat near the stage, reading Aristotle’s “Nicomachean Ethics.” He introduced Armin Rosen, an editor of Bwog.net, the online arm of an undergraduate magazine.

“This morning, I saw a phalanx of Secret Service agents eating breakfast in Café 212,” Rosen said.

Jessica Cohen, Bwog’s publisher, jumped in: “The College Republicans, probably knowing that they’d be targeted for TV time, are all wearing suits and makeup.”

Katie Reedy, another Bwog editor, said, “It’s educational to see the media circus from the inside, but this keeps happening, so we’re all a little jaded.”

“It’s not even a ‘-gate,’ ” Cohen said. “It’s like Ahmadinejad-‘mania.’ ”

A few minutes later, the forum began. Bollinger went first, delivering an address (a lecture, really) in which he touched upon, among other things, academic freedom and the imprisonment, in Iran, of a Columbia alumnus (to whom he extended, from the lectern, a visiting professorship). He concluded, “I am only a professor, who is also a university president . . . I only wish I could do better.” The Bwog contingent had been live-blogging the proceedings: “1:57: PrezBo is talking. . . . Proposes that he go talk to universities in Iran, to huge applause.” “2:03: PrezBo finishes. Oh, God—Mahmoud is up.”

Ahmadinejad began bookishly, calling Bollinger’s prelude “an insult to information.” Soon, he was rambling through a parable about the exaltedness of researchers and denouncing the academy’s bias toward the experimental and physical sciences. By the time he had accepted Bollinger’s proposal for a foreign-exchange program, invoked quantum theory to justify his denial of the Holocaust, ruled out the existence of Iranian gays, and attributed his nuclear program to a grownup version of microscope-hogging (“Some big powers create a monopoly over science”), it was clear that he was double-spacing his essay to make it seem more substantial. Weirdly, he volunteered that he still teaches weekly Ph.D.-level classes, declaring, “You know that my main job is a university professor.”

That afternoon, Bollinger had a class—W3285: Freedom of Speech and Press. The session, in Schermerhorn 501, kicked off with a T.A. announcing that the president might not be able to make it. But, five minutes later, PrezBo strode to the front of the lecture hall, and the students erupted in cheers. He approached the lectern, shedding his suit jacket magisterially and fixing his glasses on his nose. “I’m still going to call on you,” he said. “Miss Wallace?” The pages of hundreds of heavy red law books rustled as everyone tried to brush up on the Brandenburg principle.

—*Lauren Collins*

VISITING DIGNITARIES

IFTAR

President Ahmadinejad, when he comes to New York, usually holds meetings over breakfast. But his visit last week occurred in the middle of Ramadan, so he hosted a nightly *iftar*—the meal that breaks the fast each evening at sundown.

Several hundred Iranians living in New York received cryptic invitations—in Farsi, with a Yahoo e-mail R.S.V.P. address. Just after sunset two Sundays ago, at the Hilton hotel in midtown, women in hijabs and, in some cases, black chadors, accompanied by hirsute men, lined up at the escalators. “My friends told me not to come,” one young woman whispered. “But Ramadan is important to my dad, so I’m here.” A man said, “It’s a busy week in New York; there’s another *iftar*, with Maliki”—Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, the Iraqi Prime Minister.

A uniformed Secret Service officer walked by, leading a German shepherd, which tried to sniff two women in hijabs. “Dog!” one of them cried. The officer pulled the dog away without an apology, probably unaware that the animal was *najess*, or unclean. The line inched forward. “When are we going to eat?” a woman whined.

In the ballroom, people took seats at round tables set with pitchers of hot tea and plates of dates and cheese. Harried waiters delivered halal rice and kebabs. The diminutive President arrived and was ushered to a table near the stage. “Please,” an announcer said. “All rise for our national anthem.” The guests stood up, some with spoons still in their hands, as the music began. It was abruptly cut off. “I’m sorry about that,” the announcer said, referring to the faux pas of putting country before God. “We’re going to listen to a recitation from the Koran first.”

Before long, a crowd had massed around the President’s table. “Ladies and gentlemen, please,” the announcer said. “The President deserves to eat his dinner, too.” Ahmadinejad, smiling, looked up at him and mouthed some words.

“Well,” the announcer continued, somewhat peevishly, “the President graciously says it’s O.K.”

Eventually, Ahmadinejad finished his dinner and mounted the stage. “Congratulations on Ramadan!” he exclaimed to a standing ovation. “I’m truly thankful to God that I can spend this time, in this auspicious month, in the company of you Iranians in New York!” He smiled broadly. “I’m going to be brief, for I just got off a plane and I’ve been going since before *sahari*”—the predawn Ramadan meal—“almost twenty-four hours.” He went on, “When they can’t break our will”—he was

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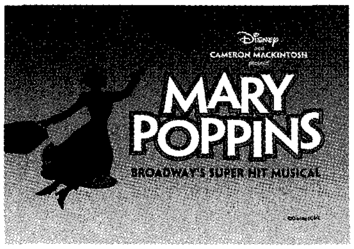
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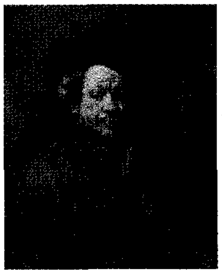

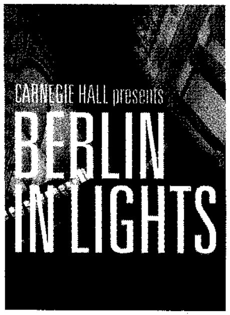
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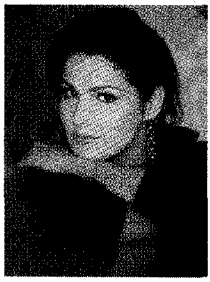

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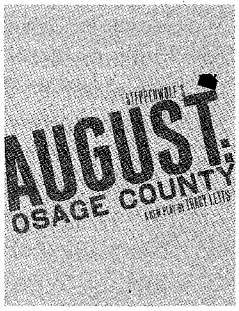
ANNA NETREBKO STARS IN ROMEO AND JULIETTE ON DECEMBER 15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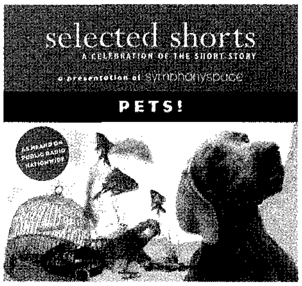
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referring to the United States—"they try to insult our history." He talked about "300," the recent movie about the Battle of Thermopylae: "That film claimed that under Darius the Great twenty-seven nations paid tribute to Iran." The audience hissed. "But, in a meeting I was in, I corrected that impression. 'No,' I said, 'under Darius *forty-two* nations paid tribute to Iran!' "

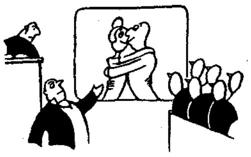
Next, he approached the nuclear issue. "Iranians have never tried to oppress anyone," he said. He looked around the room, squinting. "But the world should know that if they trample on our rights they'll meet a shameful regret stamped on their foreheads!" Cries of "Iran! Iran!" erupted. At one point, a man leaned over and whispered to a friend, "God, he's good!"

Ahmadinejad finished with a plea to the audience. "You are Iran's ambassadors," he said. "Please tell us what we can do for you." A woman in front shouted something. The President chuckled. "This lady just said that Iranian youth need to come to Iran to find Iranian women to marry. Fine! Please come—we'll make it easy for you!"

As a crowd surged toward the stage, an elderly Iranian-American man stepped up to the dais. "I used to be a judge, and I supported the revolution," he said. He rambled on, unmolested by security. "I know the President said we're not after the atomic bomb, but I say why shouldn't we have the bomb?" A bearded man walked up and tried to escort him away, but he wouldn't move. "Why shouldn't . . ." he continued, unaware that the mike had been cut off. Soon, the announcer informed the audience that the President would happily have his picture taken with anyone who wished to see him.

—Hooman Majd

COURTS
THE OFFICE



Down at the Federal Courthouse, on Pearl Street, a squalid little civil action has garnered big attention in recent weeks. Anucha Browne Sanders, a former marketing executive with the New York Knicks, is suing the team's head coach, Isiah Thomas; its owners, Madison Square Garden; and the Garden's chief executive, James Dolan, for sexual harassment and wrongful termination. She says that she was fired because of her sexual-harassment complaints, which involve, among other allegations, Thomas's hugging and attempting to kiss her, his urging her to accompany him "off site" (the new "nudge-nudge"?), and his calling her a "bitch." The Garden claims that she was fired because she was incompetent, and because she was interfering in an internal investigation of her claims. A verdict is imminent.

Many who have followed the trial have wondered why the Garden's bosses didn't just settle the case, whatever its merits. If they had, we might not have had to learn that Stephon Marbury, the team's star point guard, had sex with a Garden intern (and former "roller-skate-limbo champion") in his S.U.V., outside a strip club; that Thomas thinks it's O.K. for a black man, but not for a white man, to call a black woman a bitch ("I'm sorry to say, I do make a distinction"); that Thomas may have sent a Knicks City Dancer into the officials' locker room to flirt with the referees. As sports columnists have observed, the Garden has been more than willing to pay other undesirables (see Larry Brown, Allan Houston, Shandon Anderson) tens of millions of dollars to go away, so why not this one? The discernment of the Knicks' front office has long been suspect, as evidenced by the pitiful quintets of recent seasons. But the decision by Jim Dolan to fire someone who had complained of sexual harassment, and then to try to justify that decision in court, rather than atone for it behind closed doors, suggests that his peculiar brand of perspicacity isn't confined to basketball.

Last week, a procession of executives took the stand to parse various meetings and memos. In spite of, or perhaps even because of, the lurid particulars (Marbury: "Are you going to get in the truck?" Intern: "So I got in the truck"), the proceedings brought to mind an episode of "The Office." In "The Office," the mid-level employees of a paper company routinely harass and/or sleep with each other, make insensitive comments, and in general endure the indignities of corporate tedium and hierarchal close quartering. The dissections, during the Garden trial, of encounters such as the moment of Thomas's allegedly amorous attempted kiss, and of his subsequent comment—"What? No love today?"—were reminiscent of some of the tortured self-justifications that Steve Carell's oaf of a boss might deploy in a similar bind.

On Tuesday, Dolan took the stand. He wore a suit, and an air of something approaching self-containment, if not quite self-command. He said "um" a lot, and his gruff Long Island accent prompted occasional misunderstanding.

"The report I received was purple," Dolan seemed to say at one point, under cross-examination by Anne Vladeck, Browne Sanders's lead lawyer.

"Purple?" she asked. He restated his last word: "verbal."

"You mean oral," the judge, Gerard Lynch, said.

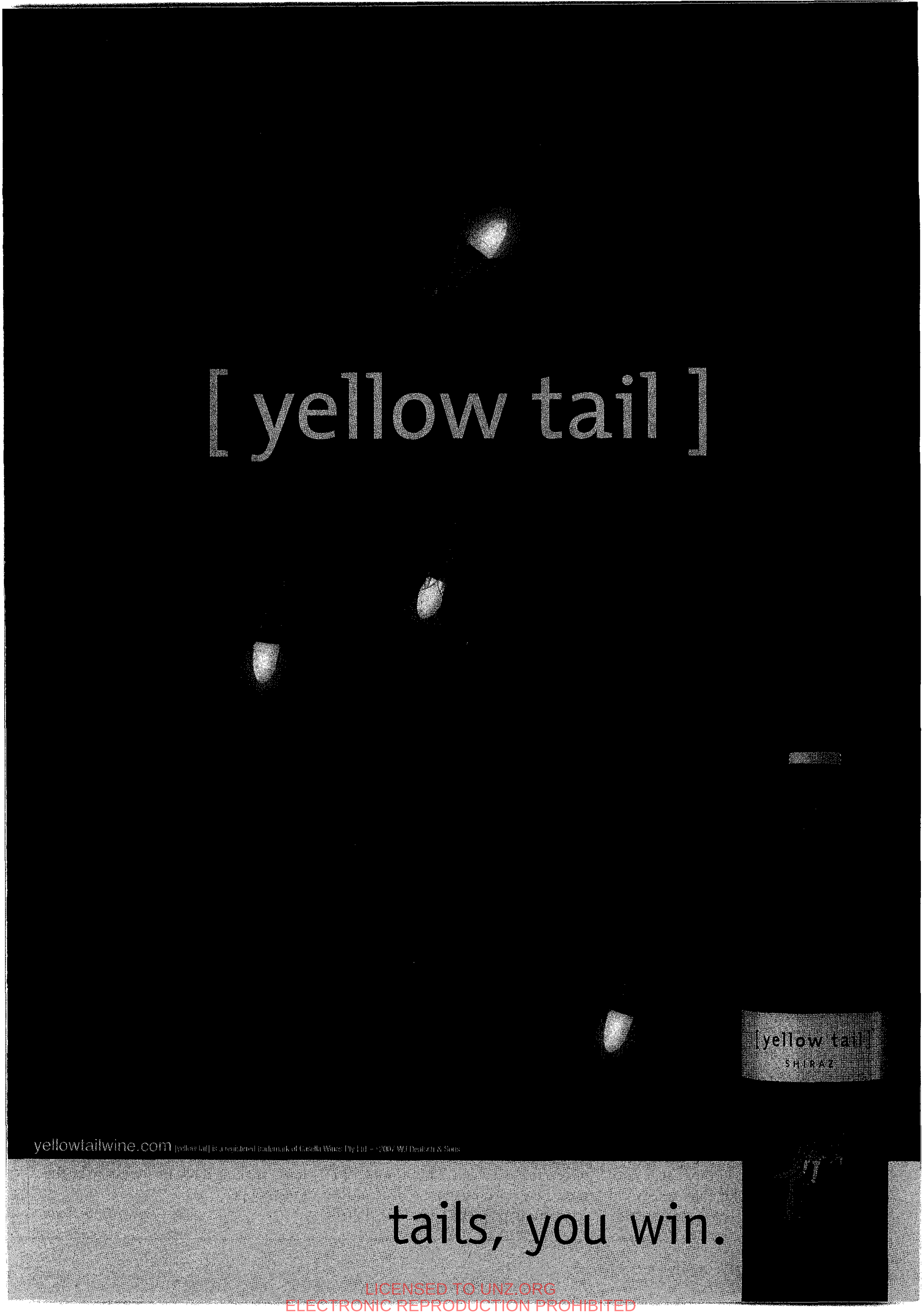
"I was going to say, we haven't seen any purple documents," Vladeck said.

"Just purple news coverage," Lynch said. Would it be too purplish, then, to observe that the pause between Vladeck's question to Dolan soon thereafter ("You believe Mr. Thomas is doing quite a good job?") and Dolan's reply ("Yes") was extremely pregnant?

That evening on cable, there happened to be a rerun of an episode from "The Office," called "Basketball," in which Michael (Carell) challenges the warehouse staff to a game of hoops. Michael picks the only African-American in the office first ("Stanley, of course." "Why 'of course'?"), drafts the receptionist as a cheerleader ("You know, some pigtails? Little halter top?"), and tells another employee, "Just try not to be too *gay* on the court." All he suffers, in the end, is some interdepartmental comeuppance, but one can imagine that the show's creators could use a lawsuit as a conceit for a two-hour farewell special, reprising, via testimony, all Michael's choicest remarks.

At the end of the episode, Michael says into the camera, "The great thing about sports is that it's all about character." As a certain Knicks enthusiast (and deviant former employee) might reply, had he attended the proceedings on Pearl Street, "Yesss!"

—Nick Paumgarten



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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

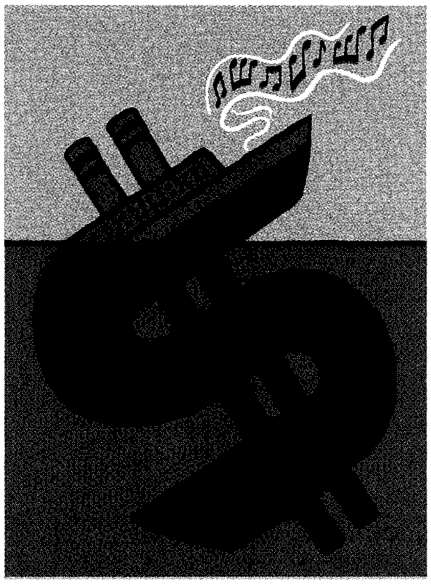
GREENBACK BLUES

Few phrases seem more quaintly outmoded these days than "sound as a dollar." Once the embodiment of American financial strength, the dollar has spent the past five years getting sand kicked in its face by the world's currencies, and in recent weeks, thanks to the Federal Reserve's surprisingly big interest-rate cut, its decline has accelerated. A euro, which you could buy for eighty-six cents in January, 2002, now costs $1.40, and the Canadian loonie, once an easy object of derision, is as valuable as a dollar. In 1922, Ernest Hemingway wrote an article explaining how to live in Paris on a thousand dollars a year. These days, an American in Paris is lucky to spend a thousand dollars a week.

Most Americans, of course, don't worry too much about the price of dinner at Taillevent. But the dollar's latest drop, in the minds of many market observers, is bad news even for Americans who stay home. We are, after all, hooked on imported goods—in 2006, the U.S. paid $1.8 trillion for foreign imports—and a weaker dollar should, in theory, make them more expensive. But, despite the daily headlines, there's little evidence that the situation has provoked anxiety. Indeed, some in Congress are trying to pressure China to revalue its currency upward, which would make the dollar even weaker.

How can Americans, with their love for foreign goods, remain indifferent to the dollar's drop? Mainly because so far it has had surprisingly little impact on our standard of living. Inflation, for instance, has remained solidly under control—the economy's core inflation rate was about two per cent over the past twelve months, and it hasn't been much higher than that in recent years. Even more surprising, the prices of imported goods have gone up only slightly. If you travel abroad, you feel like a pauper, but at home you'd be hard-pressed to notice any difference from a decade ago (with the notable exception of the price of oil).

In part, this is because exchange rates move far more quickly than real-world prices, which tend to be what economists call "sticky." It's a hassle to print new menus or product catalogues, or to go back and re-tag every item in the store, and it also confuses and alienates customers. So companies tend not to change prices all that often. They also use futures markets to hedge against currency risk, which reduces the need for price increases. And China has played a huge role. Although the dollar's value has plummeted against the euro, it has fallen much less against the Chinese yuan; that's because the Chinese government continually buys dollars to prop up their value and insure that Americans can keep buying Chinese exports, which have been fundamental to China's economic boom.



But what's most interesting is that foreign companies have essentially chosen to protect U.S. consumers from the effects of the weak dollar. They have resisted increasing prices here, accepting lower profit margins in order to maintain their market share. The American market is too big and too important for them to run the risk of losing customers, and, because it's so competitive, they generally can't raise prices without losing market share. So high-end television sets, foreign beer, and luxury cars have all remained relatively affordable, even though the dollars we buy them with are worth much less than they were a few years ago. This is not an entirely new phenomenon: a Federal Reserve study published after the dollar's crash in 1985-87 suggested that "foreign competitors relinquished profits for market share" by holding down price increases. The tendency has become even stronger since then: a recent Federal Reserve study found that changes in the value of the dollar today have half the impact on American prices that they did during the eighties. It's hardly surprising, then, that over the past three years the prices of imported goods have risen, on average, just a little more than two per cent annually.

As a result of all this, American consumers are living in a kind of cocoon, where the rules that apply everywhere else seem not to matter. This creates bizarre disjunctions; for example, foreign-made luxury cars are often cheaper to buy in the U.S. than in their home countries. Or consider Halo 3, Microsoft's new Xbox 360 game. If you buy Halo 3 from Amazon.com, you'll pay sixty bucks. If you buy it from Amazon.de, in Germany, you'll pay ninety-three dollars. Adjusted for taxes, this means that German consumers are paying twenty-six per cent more than Americans for the very same product.

The virtues of this peculiar arrangement are obvious: Americans are able to buy far more stuff with their flimsy currency than one would expect. The vice, if there is one, may be that the relative painlessness of the dollar's decline has made it easier to ignore the reasons for it, like our colossal government debt and the trillions of dollars we're going to have to spend on Medicare and Social Security for retiring baby boomers. We know that these things matter, but it's hard to get worried about them when foreign-made DVD players cost twenty-nine dollars. The danger is that if no changes are made, and the dollar continues to fall, the safety net may at some point get yanked away, with China refusing to prop up the dollar anymore and foreign companies finally forced to raise prices. As the chorus of voices lamenting the latest drop in the dollar suggest, it may well be time for Americans to emulate the ant. The problem is that the rest of the world keeps making it too easy for us to be the grasshopper.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

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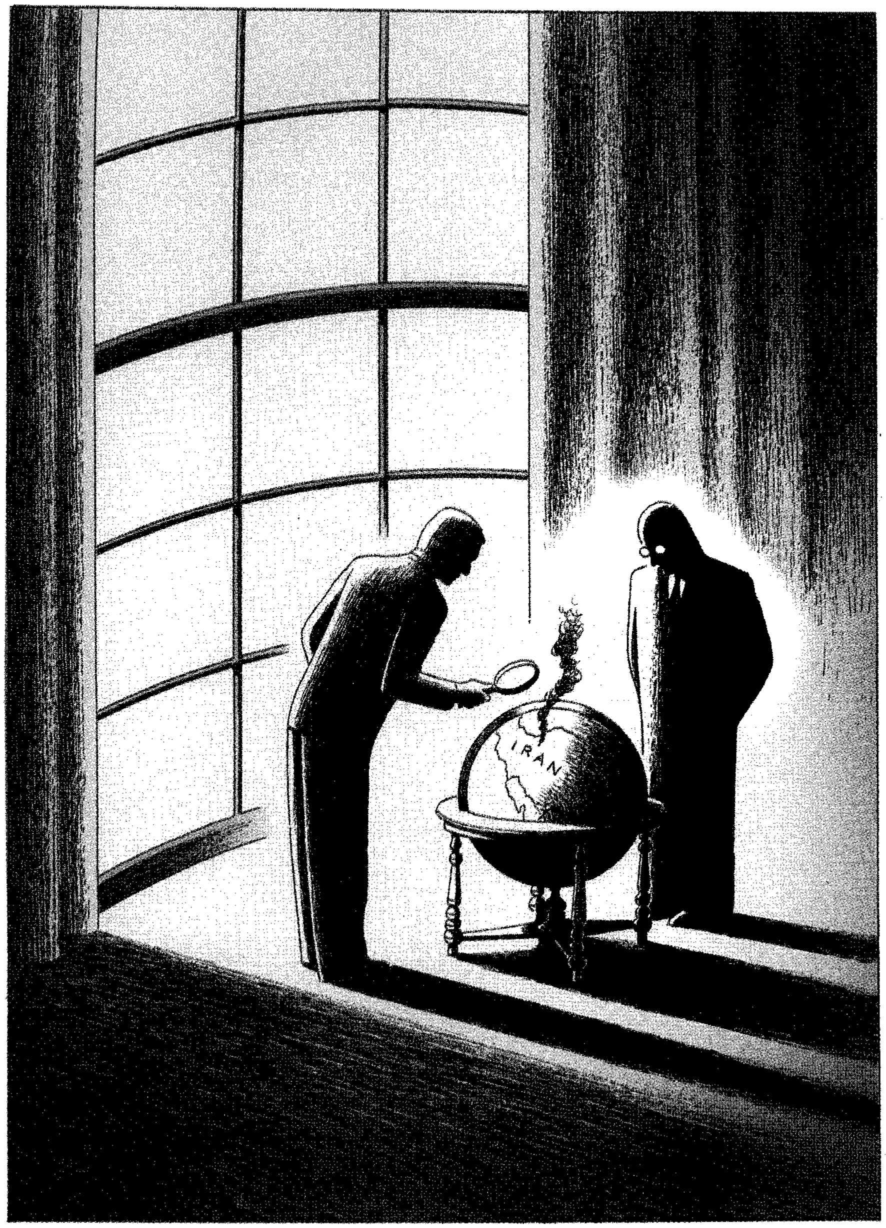
ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

SHIFTING TARGETS

The Administration's plan for Iran.

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH



GUY BILLOUT

In a series of public statements in recent months, President Bush and members of his Administration have redefined the war in Iraq, to an increasing degree, as a strategic battle between the United States and Iran. "Shia extremists, backed by Iran, are training Iraqis to carry out attacks on our forces and the Iraqi people," Bush told the national convention of the American Legion in August. "The attacks on our bases and our troops by Iranian-supplied munitions have increased. . . . The Iranian regime must halt these actions. And, until it does, I will take actions necessary to protect our troops." He then concluded, to applause, "I have authorized our military commanders in Iraq to confront Tehran's murderous activities."

The President's position, and its corollary—that, if many of America's problems in Iraq are the responsibility of Tehran, then the solution to them is to confront the Iranians—have taken firm hold in the Administration. This summer, the White House, pushed by the office of Vice-President Dick Cheney, requested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff redraw long-standing plans for a possible attack on Iran, according to former officials and government consultants. The focus of the plans had been a broad bombing attack, with targets including Iran's known and suspected nuclear facilities and other military and infrastructure sites. Now the emphasis is on "surgical" strikes on Revolutionary Guard Corps facilities in Tehran and elsewhere, which, the Administration claims, have been the source of attacks on Americans in Iraq. What had been presented primarily as a counter-proliferation mission has been reconceived as counterterrorism.

The shift in targeting reflects three developments. First, the President and his senior advisers have concluded that their campaign to convince the American public that Iran poses an imminent nuclear threat has failed (unlike a similar campaign before the Iraq war), and that as a result there is not enough popular support for a major bombing campaign. The second development is that the White House has come to terms, in private, with the general consensus of the American intelligence community that Iran is at least five years away from obtaining a bomb. And, finally, there has been a growing recognition in Washington and throughout the Middle East that Iran is emerging as the geopolitical winner of the war in Iraq.

During a secure videoconference that took place early this summer, the President told Ryan Crocker, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, that he was thinking of hitting Iranian targets across the border and that the British "were on board." At that point, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice interjected that there was a need to proceed carefully, because of the ongoing diplomatic track. Bush ended by instructing Crocker to tell Iran to stop interfering in Iraq or it would face American retribution.

At a White House meeting with Cheney this summer, according to a former senior intelligence official, it was agreed that, if limited strikes on Iran were carried out, the Administration could fend off criticism by arguing that they were a defensive action to save soldiers in Iraq. If Democrats objected, the Administration could say, "Bill Clinton did the same thing; he conducted limited strikes in Afghanistan, the Sudan, and in Baghdad to protect American lives." The former intelligence official added, "There is a desperate effort by Cheney et al. to bring military action to Iran as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the politicians are saying, 'You can't do it, because every Republican is going to be defeated, and we're only one fact from going over the cliff in Iraq.' But Cheney doesn't give a rat's ass about the Republican worries, and neither does the President."

Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman, said, "The President has made it clear that the United States government remains committed to a diplomatic solution with respect to Iran. The State Department is working diligently along with the international community to address our broad range of concerns." (The White House declined to comment.)

I was repeatedly cautioned, in interviews, that the President has yet to issue the "execute order" that would be required for a military operation inside Iran, and such an order may never be issued. But there has been a significant increase in the tempo of attack planning. In mid-August, senior officials told reporters that the Administration intended to declare Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps a foreign terrorist organization. And two former senior officials of the C.I.A. told me that, by late summer, the agency had increased the size and the authority of the Iranian Operations Group. (A spokesman for the agency said, "The C.I.A. does not, as a rule, publicly discuss the relative size of its operational components.")

"They're moving everybody to the Iran desk," one recently retired C.I.A. official said. "They're dragging in a lot of analysts and ramping up everything. It's just like the fall of 2002"—the months before the invasion of Iraq, when the Iraqi Operations Group became the most important in the agency. He added, "The guys now running the Iranian program have limited direct experience with Iran. In the event of an attack, how will the Iranians react? They *will* react, and the Administration has not thought it all the way through."

That theme was echoed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former national-security adviser, who said that he had heard discussions of the White House's more limited bombing plans for Iran. Brzezinski said that Iran would likely react to an American attack "by intensifying the conflict in Iraq and also in Afghanistan, their neighbors, and that could draw in Pakistan. We will be stuck in a regional war for twenty years."

In a speech at the United Nations last week, Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was defiant. He referred to America as an "aggressor" state, and said, "How can the incompetents who cannot even manage and control themselves rule humanity and arrange its affairs? Unfortunately, they have put themselves in the position of God." (The day before, at Columbia, he suggested that the facts of the Holocaust still needed to be determined.)

"A lot depends on how stupid the Iranians will be," Brzezinski told me. "Will they cool off Ahmadinejad and tone down their language?" The Bush Administration, by charging that Iran was interfering in Iraq, was aiming "to paint it as 'We're responding to what is an intolerable situation,' " Brzezinski said. "This time, unlike the attack in Iraq, we're going to play the victim. The name of our game seems to be to get the Iranians to overplay their hand."

General David Petraeus, the commander of the multinational forces in Iraq, in his report to Congress in September, buttressed the Administration's case against Iran. "None of us, earlier this year, appreciated the extent of Iranian involvement in Iraq, something about which we and Iraq's leaders all now have greater concern," he said. Iran, Petraeus said, was fighting "a proxy war against the Iraqi state and coalition forces in Iraq."

Iran has had a presence in Iraq for decades; the extent and the purpose of its current activities there are in dispute, however. During Saddam Hussein's rule, when the Sunni-dominated Baath Party brutally oppressed the majority Shiites, Iran supported them. Many in

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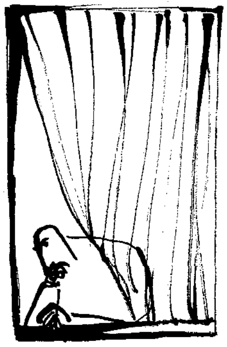
the present Iraqi Shiite leadership, including prominent members of the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, spent years in exile in Iran; last week, at the Council on Foreign Relations, Maliki said, according to the Washington *Post*, that Iraq's relations with the Iranians had "improved to the point that they are not interfering in our internal affairs." Iran is so entrenched in Iraqi Shiite circles that any "proxy war" could be as much through the Iraqi state as against it. The crux of the Bush Administration's strategic dilemma is that its decision to back a Shiite-led government after the fall of Saddam has empowered Iran, and made it impossible to exclude Iran from the Iraqi political scene.



Vali Nasr, a professor of international politics at Tufts University, who is an expert on Iran and Shiism, told me, "Between 2003 and 2006, the Iranians thought they were closest to the United States on the issue of Iraq." The Iraqi Shia religious leadership encouraged Shiites to avoid confrontation with American soldiers and to participate in elections—believing that a one-man, one-vote election process could only result in a Shia-dominated government. Initially, the insurgency was mainly Sunni, especially Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. Nasr told me that Iran's policy since 2003 has been to provide funding, arms, and aid to several Shiite factions—including some in Maliki's coalition. The problem, Nasr said, is that "once you put the arms on the ground you cannot control how they're used later."

In the Shiite view, the White House "only looks at Iran's ties to Iraq in terms of security," Nasr said. "Last year, over one million Iranians travelled to Iraq on pilgrimages, and there is more than a billion dollars a year in trading between the two countries. But the Americans act as if every Iranian inside Iraq were there to import weapons."

Many of those who support the President's policy argue that Iran poses an imminent threat. In a recent essay in *Commentary*, Norman Podhoretz depicted President Ahmadinejad as a revolutionary, "like Hitler . . . whose objective is to overturn the going international system and to replace it . . . with a new order dominated by Iran. . . . [T]he plain and brutal truth is that if Iran is to be prevented from developing a nuclear arsenal, there is no alternative to the actual use of military force." Podhoretz concluded, "I pray with all my heart" that President Bush "will find it possible to take the only action that can stop Iran from following through on its evil intentions both toward us and toward Israel." Podhoretz recently told politico.com that he had met with the President for about forty-five minutes to urge him to take military action against Iran, and believed that "Bush is going to hit" Iran before leaving office. (Podhoretz, one of the founders of neoconservatism, is a strong backer of Rudolph Giuliani's Presidential campaign, and his son-in-law, Elliott Abrams, is a senior adviser to President Bush on national security.)

In early August, Army Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, the second-ranking U.S. commander in Iraq, told the *Times* about an increase in attacks involving explosively formed penetrators, a type of lethal bomb that discharges a semi-molten copper slug that can rip through the armor of Humvees. The *Times* reported that U.S. intelligence and technical analyses indicated that Shiite militias had obtained the bombs from Iran. Odierno said that Iranians had been "surging support" over the past three or four months.

Questions remain, however, about the provenance of weapons in Iraq, especially given the rampant black market in arms. David Kay, a former C.I.A. adviser and the chief weapons inspector in Iraq for the United Nations, told me that his inspection team was astonished, in the aftermath of both Iraq wars, by "the huge amounts of arms" it found circulating among civilians and military personnel throughout the country. He recalled seeing stockpiles of explosively formed penetrators, as well as charges that had been recovered from unexploded American cluster bombs. Arms had also been supplied years ago by the Iranians to their Shiite allies in southern Iraq who had been persecuted by the Baath Party.

"I thought Petraeus went way beyond what Iran is doing inside Iraq today," Kay said. "When the White House started its anti-Iran campaign, six months ago, I thought it was all craziness. Now it does look like there is some selective smuggling by Iran, but much of it has been in response to American pressure and American threats—more a 'shot across the bow' sort of thing, to let Washington know that it was not going to get away with its threats so freely. Iran is not giving the Iraqis the good stuff—the anti-aircraft missiles that can shoot down American planes and its advanced anti-tank weapons."

Another element of the Administration's case against Iran is the presence of Iranian agents in Iraq. General Petraeus, testifying before Congress, said that a commando faction of the Revolutionary Guards was seeking to turn its allies inside Iraq into a "Hezbollah-like force to serve its interests." In August, Army Major General Rick Lynch, the commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, told reporters in Baghdad that his troops were tracking some fifty Iranian men sent by the Revolutionary Guards who were training Shiite insurgents south of Baghdad. "We know they're here and we target them as well," he said.

Patrick Clawson, an expert on Iran at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told me that "there are a lot of Iranians at any time inside Iraq, including those doing intelligence work and those doing humanitarian missions. It would be prudent for the Administration to produce more evidence of direct military training—or produce fighters captured in Iraq who had been trained in Iran." He added, "It will be important for the Iraqi government to be able to state that they were unaware of this activity"; otherwise, given the intense relationship between the Iraqi Shiite leadership and Tehran, the Iranians could say that "they had been asked by the Iraqi government to train these people." (In late August, American troops raided a Baghdad hotel and arrested a group of Iranians. They were a delegation from Iran's energy ministry, and had been invited to Iraq by the Maliki

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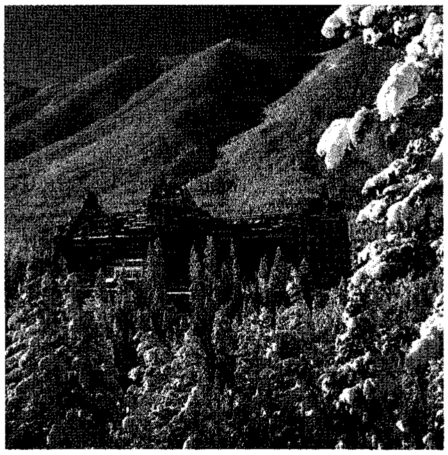

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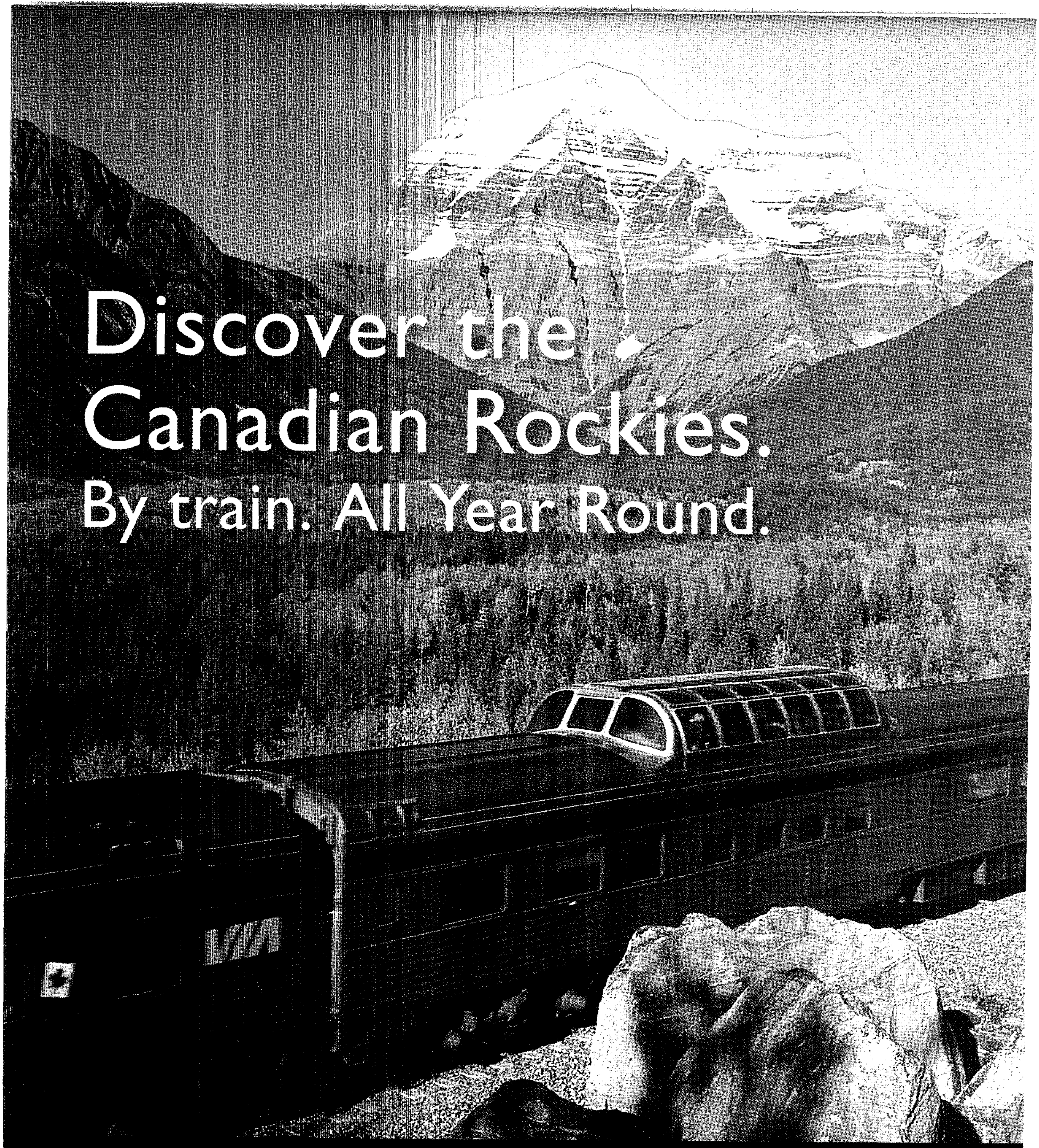
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government; they were later released.)

"If you want to attack, you have to prepare the groundwork, and you have to be prepared to show the evidence," Clawson said. Adding to the complexity, he said, is a question that seems almost counterintuitive: "What is the attitude of Iraq going to be if we hit Iran? Such an attack could put a strain on the Iraqi government."

A senior European diplomat, who works closely with American intelligence, told me that there is evidence that Iran has been making extensive preparation for an American bombing attack. "We know that the Iranians are strengthening their air-defense capabilities," he said, "and we believe they will react asymmetrically—hitting targets in Europe and in Latin America." There is also specific intelligence suggesting that Iran will be aided in these attacks by Hezbollah. "Hezbollah is capable, and they can do it," the diplomat said.

In interviews with current and former officials, there were repeated complaints about the paucity of reliable information. A former high-level C.I.A. official said that the intelligence about who is doing what inside Iran "is so thin that nobody even wants his name on it. This is the problem."

The difficulty of determining who is responsible for the chaos in Iraq can be seen in Basra, in the Shiite south, where British forces had earlier presided over a relatively secure area. Over the course of this year, however, the region became increasingly ungovernable, and by fall the British had retreated to fixed bases. A European official who has access to current intelligence told me that "there is a firm belief inside the American and U.K. intelligence community that Iran is supporting many of the groups in southern Iraq that are responsible for the deaths of British and American soldiers. Weapons and money are getting in from Iran. They have been able to penetrate many groups"—primarily the Mahdi Army and other Shiite militias.

A June, 2007, report by the International Crisis Group found, however, that Basra's renewed instability was mainly the result of "the systematic abuse of official institutions, political assassinations, tribal vendettas, neighborhood vigilantism and enforcement of social mores, together with the rise of criminal mafias." The report added that leading Iraqi politicians and officials "routinely invoke the threat of outside interference"—from bordering Iran—"to justify their behavior or evade responsibility for their failures."

Earlier this year, before the surge in U.S. troops, the American command in Baghdad changed what had been a confrontational policy in western Iraq, the Sunni heartland (and the base of the Baathist regime), and began working with the Sunni tribes, including some tied to the insurgency. Tribal leaders are now getting combat support as well as money, intelligence, and arms, ostensibly to fight Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. Empowering Sunni forces may undermine efforts toward national reconciliation, however. Already, tens of thousands of Shiites have fled Anbar Province, many to Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad, while Sunnis have been forced from their homes in Shiite communities. Vali Nasr, of Tufts, called the internal displacement of communities in Iraq a form of "ethnic cleansing."

"The American policy of supporting the Sunnis in western Iraq is making the Shia leadership very nervous," Nasr said. "The White House makes it seem as if the Shia were afraid only of Al Qaeda—but they are afraid of the Sunni tribesmen *we* are arming. The Shia attitude is 'So what if you're getting rid of Al Qaeda?' The problem of Sunni resistance is still there. The Americans believe they can distinguish between good and bad insurgents, but the Shia don't share that distinction. For the Shia, they are all one adversary."

Nasr went on, "The United States is trying to fight on all sides—Sunni and Shia—and be friends with all sides." In the Shiite view, "It's clear that the United States cannot bring security to Iraq, because it is not doing everything necessary to bring stability. If they did, they would talk to anybody to achieve it—even Iran and Syria," Nasr said. (Such engagement was a major recommendation of the Iraq Study Group.) "America cannot bring stability in Iraq by fighting Iran in Iraq."

The revised bombing plan for a possible attack, with its tightened focus on counterterrorism, is gathering support among generals and admirals in the Pentagon. The strategy calls for the use of sea-launched cruise missiles and more precisely targeted ground attacks and bombing strikes, including plans to destroy the most important Revolutionary Guard training camps, supply depots, and command and control facilities.

"Cheney's option is now for a fast in and out—for surgical strikes," the former senior American intelligence official told me. The Joint Chiefs have turned to the Navy, he said, which had been chafing over its role in the Air Force-dominated air war in Iraq. "The Navy's planes, ships,

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I COULD KILL HER.
I WISH SHE WERE DEAD.
IF SHE WOULD ONLY SHUT UP.
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and cruise missiles are in place in the Gulf and operating daily. They've got everything they need—even AWACS are in place and the targets in Iran have been programmed. The Navy is flying FA-18 missions every day in the Gulf." There are also plans to hit Iran's anti-aircraft surface-to-air missile sites. "We've got to get a path in and a path out," the former official said.

A Pentagon consultant on counterterrorism told me that, if the bombing campaign took place, it would be accompanied by a series of what he called "short, sharp incursions" by American Special Forces units into suspected Iranian training sites. He said, "Cheney is devoted to this, no question."

A limited bombing attack of this sort "only makes sense if the intelligence is good," the consultant said. If the targets are not clearly defined, the bombing "will start as limited, but then there will be an 'escalation special.' Planners will say that we have to deal with Hezbollah here and Syria there. The goal will be to hit the cue ball one time and have all the balls go in the pocket. But add-ons are always there in strike planning."

The surgical-strike plan has been shared with some of America's allies, who have had mixed reactions to it. Israel's military and political leaders were alarmed, believing, the consultant said, that it didn't sufficiently target Iran's nuclear facilities. The White House has been reassuring the Israeli government, the former senior official told me, that the more limited target list would still serve the goal of counter-proliferation by decapitating the leadership of the Revolutionary Guards, who are believed to have direct control over the nuclear-research program. "Our theory is that if we do the attacks as planned it will accomplish two things," the former senior official said.

An Israeli official said, "Our main focus has been the Iranian nuclear facilities, not because other things aren't important. We've worked on missile technology and terrorism, but we see the Iranian nuclear issue as one that cuts across everything." Iran, he added, does not need to develop an actual warhead to be a threat. "Our problems begin when they learn and master the nuclear fuel cycle and when they have the nuclear materials," he said. There was, for example, the possibility of a "dirty bomb," or of Iran's passing materials to terrorist groups. "There is still time for diplomacy to have an impact, but not a lot," the Israeli official said. "We believe the technological timetable is moving faster than the diplomatic timetable. And if diplomacy doesn't work, as they say, all options are on the table."

The bombing plan has had its most positive reception from the newly elected government of Britain's Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. A senior European official told me, "The British perception is that the Iranians are not making the progress they want to see in their nuclear-enrichment processing. All the intelligence community agree that Iran is providing critical assistance, training, and technology to a surprising number of terrorist groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, through Hezbollah, in Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine, too."

There were four possible responses to this Iranian activity, the European official said: to do nothing ("There would be no retaliation to the Iranians for their attacks; this would be sending the wrong signal"); to publicize the Iranian actions ("There is one great difficulty with this option—the widespread lack of faith in American intelligence assessments"); to attack the Iranians operating inside Iraq ("We've been taking action since last December, and it does have an effect"); or, finally, to attack inside Iran.

The European official continued, "A major air strike against Iran could well lead to a rallying around the flag there, but a very careful targeting of terrorist training camps might not." His view, he said, was that "once the Iranians get a bloody nose they rethink things." For example, Ali Akbar Rafsanjani and Ali Larijani, two of Iran's most influential political figures, "might go to the Supreme Leader and say, 'The hard-line policies have got us into this mess. We must change our approach for the sake of the regime.' "

A retired American four-star general with close ties to the British military told me that there was another reason for Britain's interest—shame over the failure of the Royal Navy to protect the sailors and Royal Marines who were seized by Iran on March 23rd, in the Persian Gulf. "The professional guys are saying that British honor is at stake, and if there's another event like that in the water off Iran the British will hit back," he said.

The revised bombing plan "could work—if it's in response to an Iranian attack," the retired four-star general said. "The British may want to do it to get even, but the more reasonable people are saying, 'Let's do it if the Iranians stage a cross-border attack inside Iraq.' It's got to be ten dead American soldiers and four burned trucks." There is, he added, "a widespread belief in London that Tony Blair's government was sold a bill of goods by the White House in the buildup to the war against Iraq. So if somebody comes into Gordon Brown's office and says, 'We have this intelligence from America,' Brown will ask, 'Where did it come from? Have we verified it?' The burden of proof is high."

The French government shares the Administration's sense of urgency about Iran's nuclear program, and believes that Iran will be able to produce a warhead within two years. France's newly elected President, Nicolas Sarkozy, created a stir in late August when he warned that Iran could be attacked if it did not halt is nuclear program. Nonetheless, France has indicated to the White House that it has doubts about a limited strike, the former senior intelligence official told me. Many in the French government have concluded that the Bush Administration has exaggerated the extent of Iranian meddling inside Iraq; they believe, according to a European diplomat, that "the American problems in Iraq are due to their own mistakes, and now the Americans are trying to show some teeth. An American bombing will show only that the Bush Administration has its own agenda toward Iran."

A European intelligence official made a similar point. "If you attack Iran," he told me, "and do not label it as being against Iran's nuclear facilities, it will strengthen the regime, and help to make the Islamic air in the Middle East thicker."

Ahmadinejad, in his speech at the United Nations, said that Iran considered the dispute over its nuclear program "closed." Iran would deal with it only through the International Atomic Energy Agency, he said, and had decided to "disregard unlawful and political impositions of the arrogant powers." He added, in a press conference after the speech, "the decisions of the United States and France are not important."

The director general of the I.A.E.A., Mohamed ElBaradei, has for years been in an often bitter public dispute with the Bush Administration; the agency's most recent report found that Iran was far less proficient in enriching uranium than expected. A diplomat in Vienna, where the I.A.E.A. is based, said, "The Iranians are years away from making a bomb, as ElBaradei has said all along. Running three thousand centrifuges does not make a bomb." The diplomat added, referring to hawks in the Bush Administration, "They don't like ElBaradei, because they are in a state of denial. And now their negotiating policy has failed, and Iran is still enriching uranium and still making progress."

The diplomat expressed the bitterness that has marked the I.A.E.A.'s dealings with the Bush Administration since the buildup to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. "The White House's claims were all a pack of lies, and Mohamed is dismissive of those lies," the diplomat said.

Hans Blix, a former head of the I.A.E.A., questioned the Bush Administration's commitment to diplomacy. "There are important cards that Washington could play; instead, they have three aircraft carriers sitting in the Persian Gulf," he said. Speaking of Iran's role in Iraq, Blix added, "My impression is that the United States has been trying to push up the accusations against Iran as a basis for a possible attack—as an excuse for jumping on them."

The Iranian leadership is feeling the pressure. In the press conference after his U.N. speech, Ahmadinejad was asked about a possible attack. "They want to hurt us," he said, "but, with the will of God, they won't be able to do it." According to a former State Department adviser on Iran, the Iranians complained, in diplomatic meetings in Baghdad with Ambassador Crocker, about a refusal by the Bush Administration to take advantage of their knowledge of the Iraqi political scene. The former adviser said, "They've been trying to convey to the United States that 'We can help you in Iraq. Nobody knows Iraq better than us.' " Instead, the Iranians are preparing for an American attack.

The adviser said that he had heard from a source in Iran that the Revolutionary Guards have been telling religious leaders that they can stand up to an American attack. "The Guards are claiming that they can infiltrate American security," the adviser said. "They are bragging that they have spray-painted an American warship—to signal the Americans that they can get close to them." (I was told by the former senior intelligence official that there was an unexplained incident, this spring, in which an American warship was spray-painted with a bull's-eye while docked in Qatar, which may have been the source of the boasts.)

"Do you think those crazies in Tehran are going to say, 'Uncle Sam is here! We'd better stand down'? " the former senior intelligence official said. "The reality is an attack will make things ten times warmer."

Another recent incident, in Afghanistan, reflects the tension over intelligence. In July, the London *Telegraph* reported that what appeared to be an SA-7 shoulder-launched missile was fired at an American C-130 Hercules aircraft. The missile missed its mark. Months earlier, British commandos had intercepted a few truckloads of weapons, including one containing a working SA-7 missile, coming across the Iranian border. But there was no way of determining whether the missile fired at the C-130 had come from Iran—especially since SA-7s are available through black-market arms dealers.

Vincent Cannistraro, a retired C.I.A. officer who has worked closely with his counterparts in Britain, added to the story: "The Brits told me that they were afraid at first to tell us about the incident—in fear that Cheney would use it as a reason to attack Iran." The intelligence subsequently was forwarded, he said.

The retired four-star general confirmed that British intelligence "was worried" about passing the information along. "The Brits don't trust the Iranians," the retired general said, "but they also don't trust Bush and Cheney." ♦

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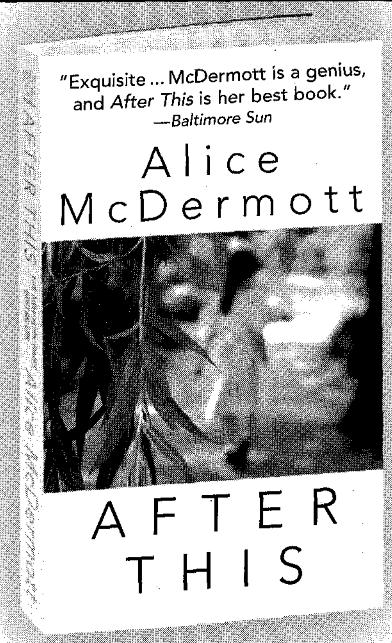
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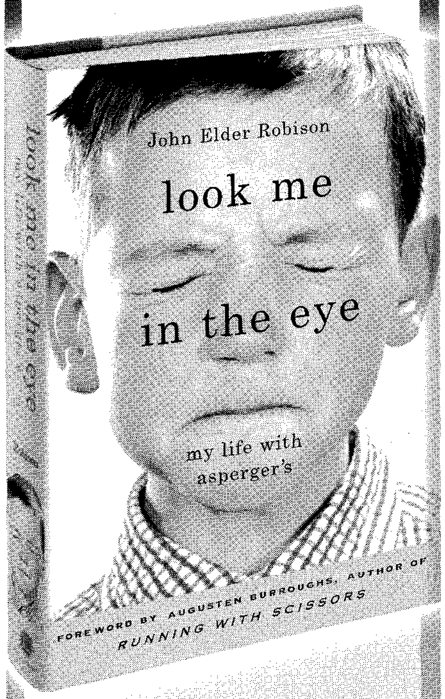

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

EXPERIMENTAL JOURNEY

Elizabeth LeCompte takes on Shakespeare.

BY JANE KRAMER

It was the top of the eighth on a drizzly night at Yankee Stadium—June 6, 2006. The Red Sox were in town, and Elizabeth LeCompte, wrapped in a thin red parka and settled into a great seat, in the seventh row, just to the right of home plate, was balancing a plastic cup of Courvoisier and a greasy carton of ballpark pizza, and studying Joe Torre, a couple of feet away at the Yankee dugout railing. LeCompte is a director, or, as she is often described, a "creator of theatre." In three weeks' time, her company, the Wooster Group, was scheduled to open in Barcelona with a new "Hamlet" that, by her own admission, was "not quite there" (it starts previews at the Public Theatre on October 9th), and LeCompte was wondering how Torre might handle the problem of a video technician notably unconcerned by a stage-right video monitor that didn't track and a Polonius with a memory block. LeCompte thinks of Joe Torre as a mentor in composure, or, you could say, a colleague in art. "I am not just a baseball fan; I am a Yankees fan and a Torre fan," she says. "I like winners, and the way Torre can keep a team together and make it shine, but he doesn't excuse anything when he loses. He says, 'It was just one of those games—you go back and forth in this business.' I wish I could be that way about a play."

It looked like one of those games that night. There were two men out, and the Yankees held a 2–1 lead, but the redoubtable Manny Ramirez was strolling to the plate, to loud booing from the Yankee bleachers. LeCompte got to her feet and joined them. ("Ramirez is *awful!*" she says.) She loves booing at the Stadium. She loves the noise and the ads and the video screens and every bit of the music, from the scratchy old Kate Smith recording of "God Bless America" to the "Y.M.C.A." of the grounds crew. She thinks of a night game in the South Bronx as an inspirational mise en scène, perhaps because it is the only spectacle in town that achieves so naturally the elegant, chaotic harmony of the best of her pop-classical, mixed-genre, technologically and textually tangled Wooster Group productions. Consider "House/Lights," from 1998, in which Gertrude Stein's "Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights" meets a sixties lesbian S&M cult flick called "Olga's House of Shame." Or her newest project, "La Didone," in which Francesco Cavalli's seventeenth-century opera travels to the edge of the galaxy by way of another Italian classic called "Planet of the Vampires." She watches the players as if she were scouting actors for a new production. She can spot the style of a West Indian island or a prairie town in the way each Yankee performs; she thinks about how he would do onstage. "Jeter's a great player, but he's too self-conscious," she said, nodding in the direction of the Yankee captain, who was leaning over the dugout fence, pointedly nursing an injured thumb as Ramirez connected on the second pitch and sent the ball soaring toward the left-field stands. "He could never be an actor." But when Melky Cabrera, racing deep into the outfield, leaped into the air for a catch that effectively saved the game, she whispered, "I liked that leap! Maybe I could use it."

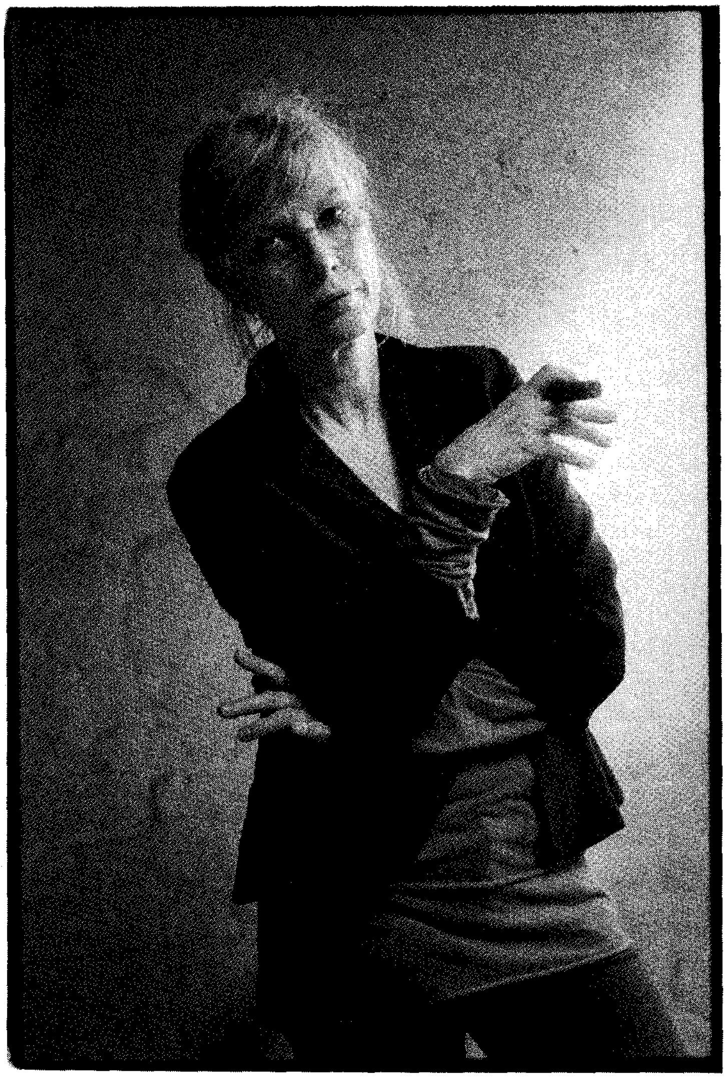
Elizabeth LeCompte is a small, slender, fine-boned woman of sixty-three, with dark-green eyes and silvery blond hair that she winds up into a floppy twist at the back of her head, and the slightly startled look of someone whose considerable beauty, not to mention talent, has caught her unaware. People meeting LeCompte for the first time receive that look. It tells them that the famous materfamilias of American experimental theatre is really a timid, fragile sort of person, and of course they want to please her. Her shyness may be her best weapon in the arsenal of what could be called the

LeCompte performance. There isn't another director in the country whose demands are so exhaustingly eclectic, or whose disapproval is so direct and steely, or whose enthusiasms are so sudden and so shifting that a few hours of rehearsal can leave her actors reeling with what one described to me as "imagination fatigue." But no one who has ever worked with her regrets the experience, and everyone in the business seems to want to have it.

Actors often talk about "the genius of Elizabeth LeCompte." Scholars of performance art write books and monographs and dissertations about the influence of Derrida or Barthes or Foucault on LeCompte's work, and on the theories of theatre that have led her to deconstruct or dissect a play—to take something familiar, something you know, or think you know, subject it to every conceivable transgression of interpretation and form, and return it to you illuminated and deepened. Luminaries of the theatrical avant-garde—Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson, and Peter Sellars among them—describe her as first among equals. Susan Sontag sat in the first row at every one of her openings, and Mikhail Baryshnikov is building a theatre for her in his new arts center in New York. In thirty years of directing, she has survived both the storm troopers of political correctness and the reverence attendant on a three-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar MacArthur "genius" award. (She gave the money to her group.) She says, "I am not an intellectual. I am not trying to *mean* anything—I'm trying to have a good time."

She works out of a tiny theatre at 33 Wooster Street, in SoHo, called the Performing Garage, where the Wooster Group was born, in the late seventies, and where it still rehearses and, occasionally, performs. Her core company consists of seventeen actors, technicians, and designers, living, as she does, on salaries that average about thirty thousand dollars a year—most notably Kate Valk, a fifty-year-old actress who is one of the group's founding members, and two younger actors, Scott Shepherd and Ari Fliakos, who are in their thirties. You will also find a couple of "associates" in every LeCompte play. They can be friends pitching in. They can be strangers whose style happens to take LeCompte's fancy. They can be pop performance artists like Casey Spooner, of the electro-clash duo Fischerspooner, who signed on as Laertes (and added a comic turn as Rosencrantz *and* Guildenstern) in the new "Hamlet"; or movie stars like Frances McDormand, who played the nurse Oenone in the 2002 New York run of "To You, the Birdie!"—LeCompte's "Phèdre," transported from Racine's Peloponnesian court to a badminton court on the stage of St. Ann's Warehouse, under the Brooklyn Bridge, and featuring the longest, if not the only, enema in theatre history.

McDormand describes the lure of LeCompte this way: "I was a middle-aged actress, and to get to work with Liz, with the only company I know with a real mission to entertain and subvert—it was like being reborn into a new life. I loved it. But I discovered that I was definitely a freelancer. I couldn't do it again." For freelancers, rehearsals are an initiation by endurance. "They were *athletic!*" McDormand says. Valk slugged her on the first day. A few days later, she sprained her ankle. She trained with Chinese "fastball" Ping-Pong and badminton coaches, and says, "My greatest, maybe my only, contribution was that I'd been a majorette—I could twirl a badminton racquet. The worst was I couldn't function with that earwiggy thing"—she means an earphone—"that Liz makes everybody wear. She's always talking through it, keeping at you, throwing you off balance, which is how she likes you to be, onstage. I said to Liz, 'I can't do that.' She said, 'What do you do?' I said, 'I get up and say the lines.' It took us a while to negotiate what you could call our different styles." The earphone went. (LeCompte says, "When I direct, it's not natural; it's a *performance*.")



"I bring things together," LeCompte says. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

Valk, an actress of legendary versatility (she was a drama student at N.Y.U. when she volunteered at the Garage, as a costume seamstress, and in a few years became LeCompte's female star and closest friend), put the experience this way: "Liz shy? Liz fragile? Don't believe it. When I met her, it was more like I had found a master I wanted to serve, and she saw in me something she wanted to use. Now that our rela-

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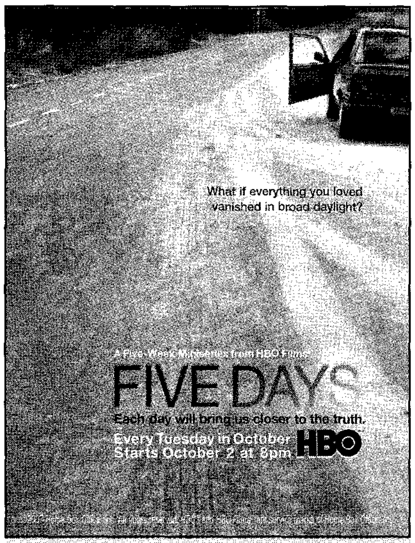
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tionship is more, well, symmetrical, I know that she's the person who is serving—not herself but this huge vision. Her imagination is one huge, fertile playground, and for her, with actors, there's really only one question: How far can you go, what's *available* to you, as a performer? She's there to engage that."

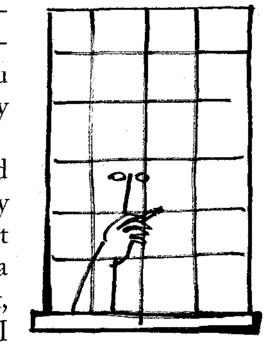
LeCompte herself says sweetly, "I am a classic voyeur. I love to *watch*. I feel like God, watching. I did some acting once. I hated that. What I loved was getting people on the stage doing what I wanted. I watch them for something that precedes the words, for a physical metaphor for where the words come from. I don't want illustration. Theatre isn't illustrative. Theatre is Katie as Emperor Jones"—a role that Valk reprised last year, in the group's revival of a nineties production of the O'Neill play—"and the way she holds her body, the way she moves in diagonals. She inhabits something so strong that, when she speaks, the words and that 'something' are equal. And when I see that happen, those two tracks coming together, it's 'Ah!'—it's an epiphany. I say this because I'm never sure of what that is, starting out. And I really don't care."

The truth is that not even LeCompte can describe how she conjures up the elements of what will become a Wooster Group play. The "Hamlet" that went to Barcelona fifteen months ago "not quite there" was already shedding its classic Shakespearean skin when it got to the Festival d'Automne, in Paris, five months later, but it was still "not there." ("Why do I do this? Why do I go on?" she said, when the curtain fell at Beaubourg.) She pronounced it "getting there" in March, after a month of previews at St. Ann's Warehouse, and in June it became "almost there" in Amsterdam. LeCompte is not talking about the acting, or the technological mix, or even her own directing, when she says "not there." In some ways, her "Hamlet" today looks pretty much the same as it did fifteen months ago in Spain—the difference being that, somewhere in what she calls "the process," those elements started to fall together in the peculiarly Wooster Group way that everyone in the company was waiting for, especially LeCompte herself.

The stage is minimal. A modular aluminum frame outlines a few deceptively quiet images: a wheeled armchair; Hamlet sitting in the armchair, reading; three video monitors facing out into the theatre and replicating bits and pieces of the actor and the stage; a wide stepped platform, stage left; and, behind it all, a large movie screen on which the curtain is about to rise on Richard Burton's "Hamlet." This is the look of a LeCompte production just before the world in her aluminum frame splinters into action and refraction—into the constant reconfigurations of illusion that you could call her signature. It happens in seconds here: Hamlet twists himself toward the screen and shouts, "O.K., play that movie!," and what you get for the next three hours is a virtual "downloading" of the film that Burton made of his own stage "Hamlet," in 1964—an attentive, impatient, fiercely disciplined, and comically anarchic return of that famous star turn to the theatre.

LeCompte once said that she works on a play as if it were a new house. "I attach terrifically to houses," she told me. "I like to build them—I have the visual idea right away—and fill them. I bide my time and I don't move on very quickly. With a play, it's the same." Her stage directions consist of broad, linear swoops and mysterious smudges that she sketches into her rehearsal notes and then takes home and studies and keeps adjusting until, in her mind's eye, everything seems to be moving right. The stage designer Jim Clayburgh, who created the first of the modular frames that, you could say, manage the field of play for LeCompte's imagination, put it this way: "Liz directs with her eyes. She 'sees' thoughts, 'sees' ideas. That's her talent." And her old friend Peyton Smith, an actress who worked with her for almost twenty years, told me, "Liz watches the worst kind of television and reads the finest books, she goes to the opera one night and a ballgame the next—and brings all those ideas and images to the theatre. She watches, she reads, she *directs* like she eats, picking at a little of everything. She gives you a little hit of this or that, and then *you* finish the collage—she'll put things on the table and say, 'Here, entertain me,' and then kind of disappear. But then she'll say, 'God, I hate that!,' and start discarding, rearranging, changing her mind, changing it back. You have to trust her. Even when it hurts."

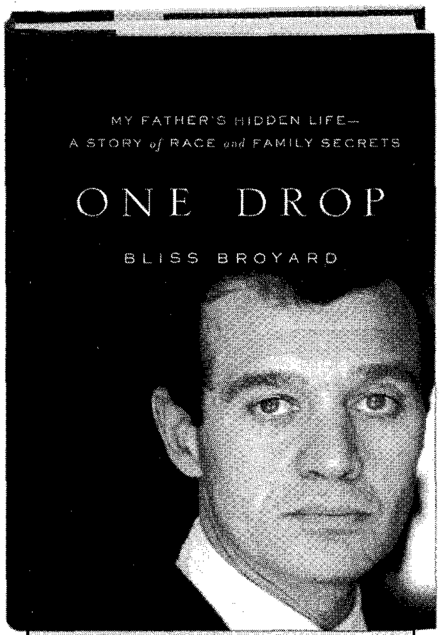
LeCompte grew up in New Jersey, the second of four children in a scrappy suburban household. "The six of us fought and screamed over the news on 'Huntley-Brinkley'" is how she describes dinnertime at home. Her mother, who had gone to Barnard, was "the literary one, the one who took me to the library." Her father, an engineer with a local rubber company, was happiest on his sailboat. "They stuck it out; I admired that," she says. "They gave me a measure of what was not me. I was not going to be a librarian. I was going to be the most famous person in the world." Her younger sister, Ellen, a self-described dropout actress (LeCompte prefers "bon vivant"), told me that as a girl LeCompte was "vain, selfish—she was a cheerleader; she had boyfriends—and always a little angry, but she was also very protective." She said, "We shared a bedroom, and, in that volatile household, she'd tell me stories at night to calm me down. And she was a stand-up person. I liked that best about her. You don't go to Liz for comfort. You go to find out what she thinks." LeCompte agrees with "angry." She founded a girl gang at the age of seven. She fought with boys. ("Once, I lost; I was so mad.") She liked playing boys' games—she was the only girl on her junior-high softball team—though not as much as she now likes watching figure skating, "where they're all so fabulously tarted up, and you can wonder, What are they going to wear?"



By high school, she wanted to be a painter. "I don't really remember why," she says. "It was little things. I read a book about Benjamin West, who made his own paint. I had a crazy neighbor who painted. She made liquid chocolate pudding, and I liked her." Once, talking about the "big, minimalist abstract charcoal architectural drawings" that she produced as a student at Skidmore, in the mid-sixties, she said, "All I knew was that I was going to be an artist. That was wild for a girl of my generation from New Jersey at a middling college. My mother had been a bit of a rebel once. She got married in a deep-purple velvet dress. But then she got confused, or maybe it was disinterest. I always kept my eye on the prize."

In 1963, when LeCompte was a college freshman, she landed a Friday-through-Sunday job baking and waitressing at a Saratoga Springs coffeehouse called the Caffè Lena. The Lena was a paid-with-meals pit stop for a lot of young folksingers—Bob Dylan and Arlo Guthrie among them—and, eventually, for a group of actors recruited by an expatriate Welsh director named John Wynne-Evans, who used the café as a weekend theatre. "He hired all the handsome young men," LeCompte says. "But he had no ingénues. So the ingénue was me." Her first play was called "The Constant Lover," after the John Suckling poem; her second was Camus's "Caligula." "I had trouble learning the lines," she says. "He didn't mind. 'Just sit there,' he said, 'and wear these clothes.'" One of the handsome young men was the actor Spalding Gray. He was twenty-four then—capricious, adventurous, temperamental, tormented, and undeniably gifted. Ellen LeCompte described him to me as "a giving narcissist, a warm place to be, with lots of self-love to go around." He and Elizabeth LeCompte lived together, off and on, for twelve years.

"I liked the whole scene," LeCompte says of their first few years in New York. "We had that security that middle-class kids had then, before the worst of the Vietnam War. We somehow knew that, for us, it would be all right." They moved to a railroad flat on Ninety-third Street off Second Avenue. They rented an apartment in San Miguel de Allende. They worked as extras in B movies, playing hippies. LeCompte sold postcards at the Metropolitan Museum and drew, at night, in a makeshift studio at home, while Gray made the Off Broadway rounds, dropping off his résumé. The director Richard Schechner, whose company, the Performance Group, was installed in the building on Wooster Street that LeCompte's company owns now, discovered the résumé in 1969, during a



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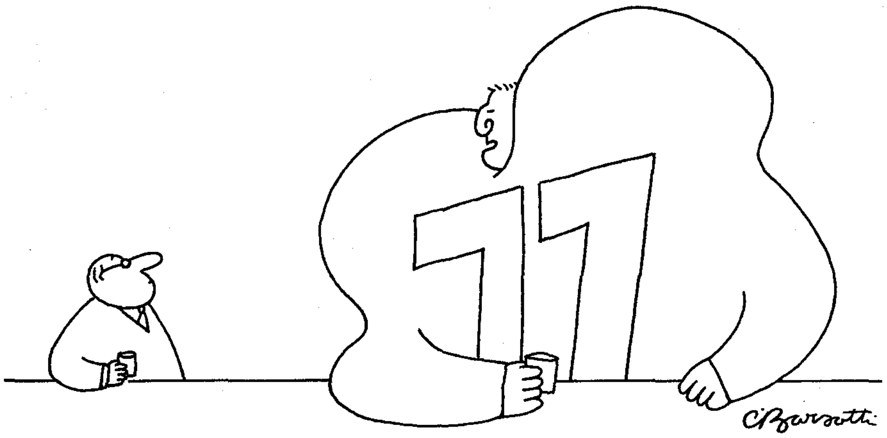

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casting crisis for a retelling of "Macbeth"—Macduff had quit to play Mr. Peanut in the Planters commercials—and four days later Gray opened at the Performing Garage. LeCompte went to work for the company in 1970. She started off as a designer. A year later, she was Schechner's assistant director. By the end of that year (with Schechner away in Asia), she was directing the group herself. When he came home, he cast her in Sam Shepard's "The Tooth of Crime," and eventually cajoled her into three more plays. He says that the things she hated about acting were the things that made her memorable as an actress: her fright, her embarrassment, and the look on her face that told an audience, "I wish I were someplace else."

Most of the actors who went on to work with LeCompte started out at the Garage with Schechner: among them, Ron Vawter, a mainstay of the Wooster Group, who died, of AIDS, in 1994, at the age of forty-five; and Willem Dafoe, who was a twenty-two-year-old doctor's son from a small Milwaukee repertory company when Schechner encountered him at a theatre festival in Baltimore. ("What I liked was that huge face, that menace and sensitivity," Schechner told me.) But Schechner's own talents were, by his admission, fairly scattered. He wrote books about theatre. He was interested in performance theory—he teaches performance art at N.Y.U. now—and in the anthropology of theatre. In 1974, LeCompte and Gray formed a kind of company within Schechner's company, working together on "Sakonnet Point"—the first play in the trilogy about Gray's troubled childhood and his mother's suicide, known today as "Three Places in Rhode Island." At first, Schechner told them that, as long as they were on the stage doing "Mother Courage" for him at seven, it was not a problem if they used it for their own play at eleven. But the break was inevitable, and, as one of their old colleagues put it, "Liz's star was ascendant, and that meant 'Exit Richard.'" LeCompte says, "I'm extremely competitive. In a group, there's only one leader, and if you're the one you don't have to compete, you're free."

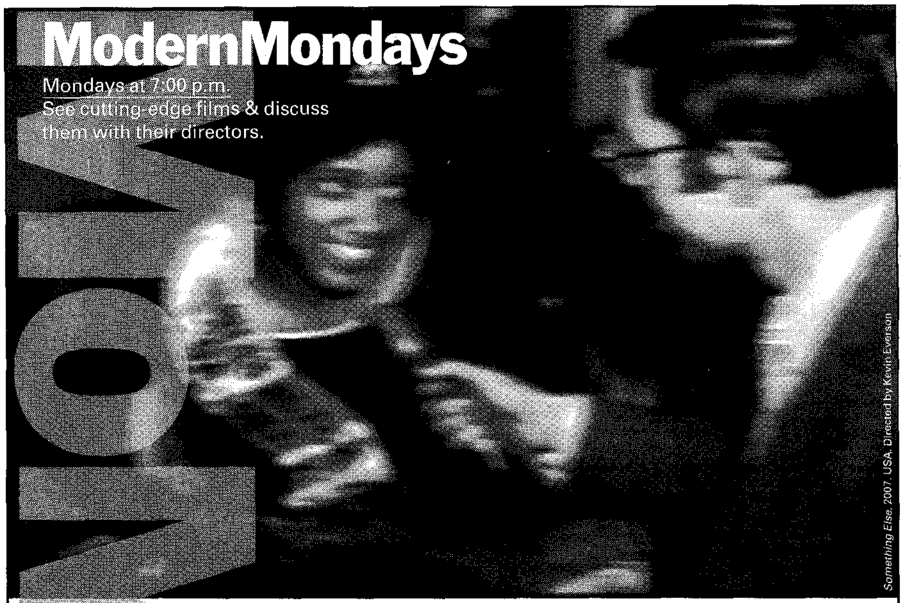
"Sakonnet Point" opened at the Garage in 1975 and made downtown theatre history. It wasn't a monologue, like Spalding Gray's later pieces. It was the first of LeCompte's downloadings—an acting out of the thoughts and people and confusions in Gray's head. LeCompte often uses the word "framing" to describe her work: "I hook into people's dreams about themselves. I make a frame for them. I get to know them. I say, 'Oh, let's find a way to give them back to you.' It wasn't that I had this thing about wanting to be a director. I said to Spalding, 'I'll make a frame for your dreams.'" By the late seventies, LeCompte and Gray were living on Wooster Street, across the street from the Garage and one floor down from the loft where LeCompte lives now. They were working on the last piece of the Rhode Island trilogy, "Nayatt School," and on an epilogue called "Point Judith." "What Liz was doing was the creation of Spalding," Dafoe told me. LeCompte says, "I just wasn't as confident as Spalding. He gave me that confidence because I could stand behind him. I didn't care if people knew it was me. I saw him as a character in his own drama. He was too literal. He had no visual sense. But the story? I could never touch that."

Their relationship, though not their collaboration, ended in 1979, when LeCompte left Gray for Dafoe, who was then appearing in Schechner's production of Jean Genet's "The Balcony." Gray later described the breakup to a reporter this way: "Whenever we'd play Monopoly, she'd flip the board over if I got too far ahead. Someone that competitive needs to be with someone who can pass the whip, and Willem can." The breakup was actually much less rancorous. Gray and LeCompte divided their loft with a wall and a door that was never locked, and he acted in her productions for the next several years. Eventually, he married. (In 2001, he was injured in a car crash, and not long afterward attempted suicide. In 2004, he disappeared; his body was found in the East River.)

The Performing Garage officially changed hands in 1980, with LeCompte putting together a new company whose founding members were to have a say on every invitation the company received and every project it pursued. From the beginning, the Wooster Group was known for the odd mixture of democratic illusion and despotic charm that she imposed. But by all accounts she hid behind the company, the way she had hidden behind Gray. She never put her name forward, and her friends say that for a long time not even her most attentive audiences understood how much of the work was hers. Her son, Jack Dafoe—a public-policy researcher, three years out of Yale, who has his father's face and his mother's piercing curiosity—told me, "Liz still spends a certain amount of time hiding herself. I think she was always confident, but maybe she didn't think that as a woman she could do that—step center stage as the auteur."

LeCompte spent twenty-five years with Dafoe. They never married, and they were often apart, with LeCompte touring with the company and Dafoe commuting between his life onstage and the life on-camera that made him a movie star and, in large part, kept the company secure. One of their friends describes the Wooster Group in those days as "a French farce of entrances and exits"—a big, close, arty, eccentric, libidinous extended family. Jack was shepherded home from school by his nanny, Dennis Dermody, a large blond man of irresistible gentleness and humor whom Ron Vawter had discovered managing a Provincetown movie house and had brought to New York as custodian of the "little tin cash box" in the lobby of the Garage. Dermody, who today writes a movie column for the magazine *Paper*, is the family archivist—the one who kept the scrapbooks of Jack, at three, in a Philippines jungle with his mother, watching Oliver Stone film his father in "Platoon," or of Jack, at five, in Morocco, waving to his father, nailed to the Cross and dripping blood, in Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ." Dafoe says that he thought of the Wooster Group then as a "forever factory" ("I fell in love with the woman *and* the group"), that it gave him his legitimacy as an actor. When he was home, he put himself in LeCompte's hands, and, while they battled famously at rehearsals—he is eleven years younger than she is, and their friends say he wanted all her attention—his performances were often spectacular. LeCompte hates talking about Dafoe, who left her four years ago and married a young Italian film director. The company shares her indignation and protects her privacy. "Willie was the center of my life, not my work," she says. "I was the center of my work."

LeCompte's projects often begin this way: someone in the group, not necessarily her, will come in with a text, or have an idea, and if it pleases LeCompte the shape of a play slowly begins to emerge. She will assemble her players and call in her designers and technicians and engineers. She will listen to their thoughts and look at the things they bring—a book or a picture or a piece of music or, for that matter, a piece of clothing—and take in their reactions and sometimes laugh or, more often, groan while they stumble around inside their own heads in what could be called a first rehearsal. ("For Liz, the beginning of a new piece is the hardest part," Ari Fliakos says. "She's going to have to sit and watch us butt our heads


Something Else. 2007. USA. Directed by Kevin Everson

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October 22
Kevin Everson
Everson manipulates old films and news footage to make works about the working-class culture of black Americans. This presentation includes *Emergency Needs* (2007); *Something Else* (2007), an interview with Miss Black Roanoke, Virginia, 1971; and several shorts.

October 29
Ernie Gehr
Gehr discusses two structuralist masterpieces separated by twenty years—*Serene Velocity* (1970) and *Side/Walk/Shuttle* (1991)—and relates them to his interest in pre-cinema objects and the artists who invented a "cinema of attractions."

Modern Mondays is supported by The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art and Jennifer McSweeney.

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together for the next few years, so we better be entertaining. The fear of disappointing her is a trap that serves.") And at some point you will hear that epiphanous "Ah!" when LeCompte sees *her* idea and starts taking over, transforming everything they have said or acted out with what Jim Clayburgh calls her "meticulous arbitrariness," and Kate Valk calls "the stuff she does," and freelancers like Frances McDormand call "the brutal part," and LeCompte herself describes by saying, "I love the way things change. It's not an intellectual figuring out. I'm not a traditional director. I don't like to be in charge until I know what I want. I like to get lost in it until I know."

It can be a long haul. The rehearsals for "Birdie!" continued off and on for two and a half years. The work on "Hamlet," which I started following in the spring of 2006, hoping to catch a full cycle of the LeCompte process, had actually begun two years earlier, when Scott Shepherd, an actor who is by his own admission "obsessed by the play," organized some night readings, downstairs at the Garage. LeCompte sat in on a few and one night said, "O.K., let's do it!" Shepherd has a pale, handsome face, wiry red hair, and a long, agile athlete's body that can fill a stage. He has been acting with the group since 1997, when LeCompte saw him perform with the downtown theatre company Elevator Repair Service. Two years later, she started using him on tours caught without a leading man because of Dafoe's shooting schedule. Fliakos, who plays Claudius to Shepherd's Hamlet (he is sandy-haired, compact, and even more mysteriously expansive), was an intern at the Garage, fresh from Duke, when LeCompte tapped him for the same reason. Today, they provide the company with the strong male counterpoint to Valk's enormous talent and almost chameleon transformations (she is Ophelia *and* Gertrude) that it was in danger of losing when Dafoe left, though, being primarily stage actors, they have nothing like his movie-star celebrity.

LeCompte is pointedly unconcerned with the questions that plague most people who direct "Hamlet": Is Hamlet mad or sane? Does he love Ophelia? Does he desire his mother? Is the ghost of his father real or a figment of his weak or guilty or burning imagination? She is not interested in probing Hamlet's character; she is amazed that anyone would find that interesting, or the results enriching. (Six months into "the 'Hamlet' process," she invited the Harvard Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt to talk to the company about the play. She thanked him for coming and said she was sorry, but it was hard to see how a director could apply all that academic theory to the stage.) She prefers what you could call the style or artifice of character. She is attached to surfaces. She believes in the power of surfaces to deepen and disturb—or, as she puts it, to "surprise"—reality. "If I had been born ten years later, I would definitely be in television," she once told me, by way of explaining why, apart from the hour she sets aside for yoga every morning, the two television sets in her loft are almost always on. "I love that two-dimensional TV world. It's not ambiguous, like film; I can *feel* the surface."

LeCompte had never directed Shakespeare before she took on "Hamlet." But she had seen Richard Burton's "Hamlet" when it played in New York in 1964. "I invited my mother," she says. "I wanted to go because it was Burton, and that meant Elizabeth Taylor might be there. I *loved* Elizabeth Taylor—she had my name—and, after the play, there she was, all in pink, like Jackie Kennedy, coming out of the stage door. It made a deep impression." She says that when she heard her actors at the Garage "struggling with that Shakespearean language" she started watching "Hamlet" movies with them, and thought of Burton. "His was the first big-movie-star Shakespeare on Broadway. He filmed the performance in Electronovision and showed it in movie houses for two days, so everyone in America could see it at the same time. He was in love with his own voice, and that was the attraction for Scott. The voice and the words. I thought, This is what I do—bring things together. I take something, I copy it, and maybe something's revealed that's not in the original. I go for that. It's a way of passing on a tradition by reinventing a play."

LeCompte goes to every performance of every Wooster Group play. She folds herself into an aisle seat, next to whatever assistant is logging her complaints or her satisfactions, and tries

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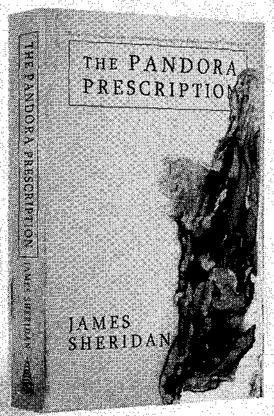

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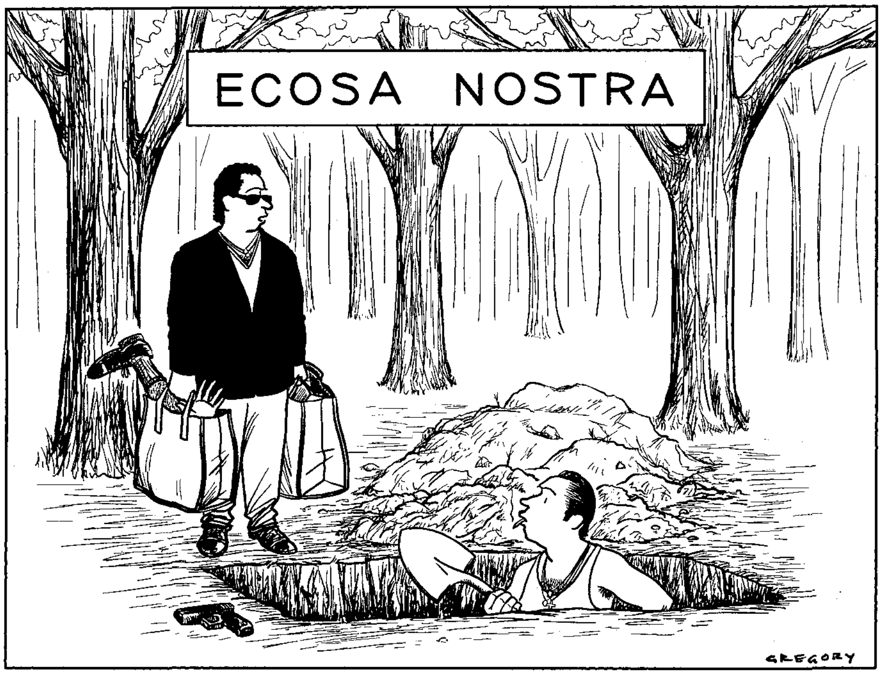
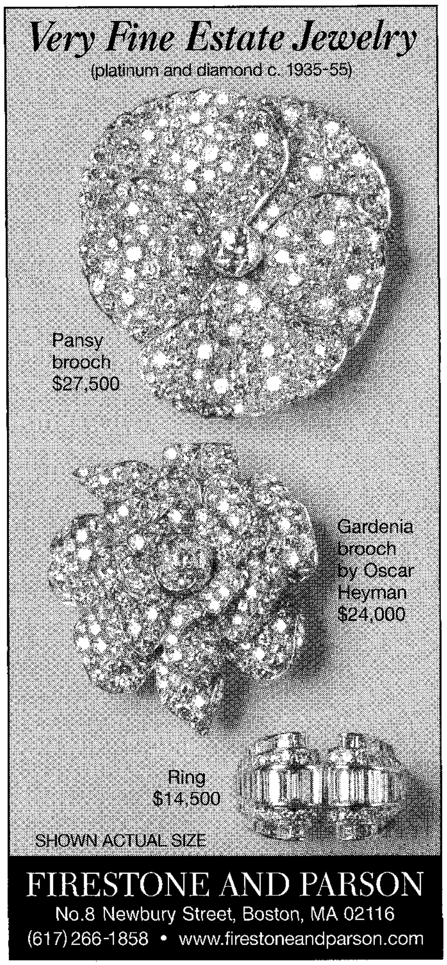
to pretend that no one will recognize her, though of course by now some do. She is an avid eavesdropper. She has been known to tape the comments that her audiences make after a performance, and even accused of planning to use them for a new play. (She denies the part about the play, but not the part about the taping.) She enjoys the thrill of anonymity; she says it gives her a kind of nice power, and, besides, she could never endure the scrutiny she gives her actors. "I hide from being watched by watching," she once said. Even the thought of having her picture taken leaves her close to panic—though you can catch glimpses of her in the rehearsal videotapes stored upstairs at the Garage; she is the small blond woman scurrying across the stage in old jeans, a baggy black pullover, and bright-red flats. Once, she agreed to sit for Annie Leibovitz. "It wasn't a celebrity picture," she says. "I liked it. I looked eighty, from the Ozarks. I looked like I was dying. A college friend I hadn't heard from in twenty years saw it and called and said, 'Liz, are you all right?' "

In a way, LeCompte's ideal production would be one that no one saw. She has never really got used to the idea of having a play reviewed; some of the same papers that now talk about her "genius" gave her such a terrible time, early on, that in 1987 she barred critics from the Garage and didn't invite them back for the next five years. In 1981, she lost nearly half her funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, because of the critical uproar over a play called "Route 1 & 9 (The Last Act)," which combined pieces of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" with a blackface routine that was both a reference to the great black vaudevillian Pigmeat Markham and a sendup of the minstrel parodies of blackness that were once performed for the amusement of whites. (The play ended with an orgiastic battle. Richard Schechner called it a "wonderful embrace and simulation of chaos," but virtually all the city's mainstream critics pronounced it racist.) In 1983, with the company about to preview a piece called "L.S.D.," she had what she calls her "Miller problem." That production combined an acid trip with a deadpan latter-day courtroom rendering of scenes lifted from "The Crucible," Arthur Miller's play about the Salem witch trials.

"Miller was the same generation as my father—cheap," she says. "We had called his agent for months, but they were refusing to even talk price, so we decided to try it anyway, because, after all, I wouldn't care if I thought somebody stole from me. Jack was six months



"Instead of plastic garbage bags, I thought we could try these earth-friendly canvas totes."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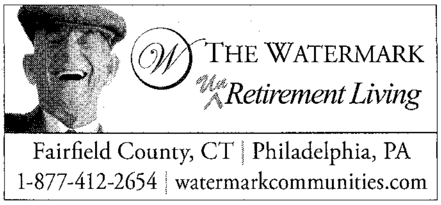
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old then, Willem was off on a movie, and I was struggling to finish the piece. I was such a wreck that there was eczema seeping from my hands. We were six months into open rehearsals at the Garage, when Miller finally showed up to see it. He came up the stairs and saw my hands with this huge wrapping of gauze around them, and I told him, 'Mr. Miller, I've had a very bad cooking accident.' How could I say, 'Mr. Miller, it's eczema from my nerves, from coping with *you*.' So he sat down, and it was pretty stunning for him. The first thing he said was 'Why is the audience laughing?' We were doing very well with 'L.S.D.,' but he was a man who couldn't tell where we were coming from. A week later, his agent called and said, 'No way!' He threatened to shut us down. We shut down." A year later, a "much less Miller" version of the play opened as "L.S.D. (. . . Just the High Points . . .)." The cease-and-desist letter arrived in ten days.

The worst scrutiny, she says, is touring. She calls it "compromising" and says that it leaves her feeling desolate. "At the Garage, it's *me* doing the inviting, inviting you into my living room," she told me at breakfast, the day after the Paris "Hamlet" opening. "If you don't like it, then it's just a bad party for you, nothing more. But, on tour, I'm selling a product. I have to please the people who are paying us to come, and I don't work for that. If I'm rejected, it's no fun, and, if I do well, then I'm pumped up in a way I don't like, either." It used to be a hallmark of LeCompte's productions that some of the audience would walk out, furious or bewildered, in the middle of opening night—if they were not actually flinging vegetables at the stage. ("I'd sit there with them. They'd throw the vegetables, and I'd go, 'Yeah! Right!,' so they wouldn't know it was me.") For years, she could predict it. Germans walked out of plays about women: "'House/Lights'? A female Faust? No one would even book it. They're not going to go there." The French walked out of plays about men: "Too messy, too chaotic," they would say. The Scots and the Spaniards and the Austrians (who were known for muttering "This is shit!" during any Wooster Group play) walked out, period. They walk out less now. Some thirty people left after the first act of the Barcelona "Hamlet." By the time the company got to Paris, the number was down to two. Audiences are in awe of LeCompte now, in ways that she says she really doesn't understand.

LeCompte's loft is a kind of image box, as spare as the aluminum frame across the street at the Garage, and as full of surprises: riverbed stones that she trucked in from an upstate stream, scrubbed by hand in the bathtub, and laid out, like the border stones in a Japanese garden, to absorb leaks from the old industrial pipes that line a poured-epoxy floor; framed college drawings propped face to the wall near the front door, a little covert, like LeCompte herself; a hanging patchwork quilt composed entirely of little plastic cocaine bindles, and an occasional sniffing straw. The effect is peaceful. The clutter of the past is something she keeps downstairs, like a stage set from some other play, in the half of the loft that she once shared with Gray and then Dafoe. (Shepherd uses it now, and cooks at the Magic Chef that she and Gray dragged in from the street in 1972.) It is overflowing with old furniture and with books that she brings upstairs to read—there were three translations of Dostoyevsky's "The Possessed" by her bed when she started rehearsing "Hamlet"—and always, in the end, returns. When I asked her why, she said, "Upstairs is how I like my life now. Simple."

She often talks about giving up the theatre. She says that she's tired, or that she "can't go on." Her friends are used to that. (Joanna Ross, who arranged the tours for LeCompte and Gray in the early days, remembers her breaking down in the middle of a meeting with a Dutch producer who had crossed the Atlantic to see her and sobbing, "I just don't know if I can do this." Ross, by her account, "was quietly freaking out when Spuddy"—Spalding Gray—"intervened. He was very calm. He said, 'I want to do this, Liz. I want these plays to be seen.' And, amazingly enough, Liz sat up, dried her tears, and said, 'Let's go.'") But the pressures have grown with the company, with its reputation, and with the cost and size and technological complexity of LeCompte's productions. She says that it has taken "too many projects, and too many tours," just to keep paying her bills and salaries. In the past thirteen months, she not only rehearsed and toured with "Hamlet" and "La Didone" but created a performance piece called "Who's Your DADA?!," for the Dada show at the Museum of Modern Art, and moved the company to Moscow for two weeks for a revival of "To You, the Birdie!" "I was the only one voting against going to Moscow," she told me. "I was right. My first hotel room was a horrible little garret. There were two thin cots, head to head, covered with cigarette burns. You couldn't step on the bathroom floor—I had to wash it—and when I left for a second somebody stole four hundred dollars from my windowsill. But 'Birdie!' was shocking to the Russians, and the people who brought us were ecstatic; they liked shock. Russians tend to want big authority all the time, even in theatre. They had to jump from Lenin to modern art. It was interesting. It worked out. It was O.K."

You could describe the "Hamlet" that opens this month as the culmination of a grand battle between LeCompte and Shakespeare. "I started out thinking, This is not our language," she says. "You can't 'translate' from his English. It seemed like a fetish to me, because I always see texts as objects. They have a solidity—it's not theoretical—and I don't look for metaphor or analogy or meaning. Then I started watching more of the 'Hamlet' films." At some point during the past two years (she doesn't remember when), she added a sweep of battlefield footage from Grigori Kozintsev's great Russian "Hamlet." She toyed with the idea of slipping in a bit of Mel Gibson's earnestly turgid prince. By the time she got to Paris, Gibson had lost to a moment of Kenneth Branagh, in eyestrain closeup, blasting away the ambiguities of the Burton film, and Charlton Heston, in near-drag, declaiming as the Player King. (Today she is thinking about a dance inspired by a "Hamlet" riff in a Vitaphone short from the nineteen-thirties.) She had replaced the blocked Polonius (but not the ubiquitous collapsible walker that Polonius wheels around the stage). She had put a microphone into Casey Spooner's hands and told him to go ahead, croon some lines. By the time of the St. Ann's previews, the stage-right monitor had recovered. The film came in and out of focus when it was meant to. The soundtrack, which sharpens and fades and stops and starts, lost its static, except, of course, when LeCompte wanted static, and she stopped calling to her soundmen, "Be more musical! This should be moving like water, not a truck." More to the point, the company was suddenly filled with "Hamlet," possessed by the play—in galloping pace with an edited "Burton template" that went into the actors' earphones, stripped of what Shepherd (who did the stripping) calls "its 'proper' rhythms of delivery, those mental and emotional transitions, those pauses for *meaning*." LeCompte, who had started by saying, in effect, "Forget the words!," decided that "Hamlet" *was* the words. They became the telling surface, the artifice and style that deepens. Shakespeare had won the day, but on her terms. "You see, it's not the character; it's the language," she told me, the last time we talked about the play. "It's the words that hold everything together.

"I used to get mad at my plays, but it's different now," she said. "This thing, the theatre, it isn't necessary to me. My fears are about dying, and not being loved. You know what I want? I want a dog. A dog who's out hunting all day, and he comes home, pant, pant, and I know he loves me. How do you define pleasure? Sometimes I just want to stare at the sky, to sit in a beautiful space and stare at the sky through trees. Am I just lazy? I'm guilty even feeling that way. Well, not so much guilty but anxious. And now—all the work I'm doing—I'm not even anxious, because I know I could walk away. I see my friend Alex Katz, painting, painting—probably he'll die painting. 'Oh, move over here,' I say. 'Tell me your secret.' But my actors are happy. I've given them something, and they're entertaining me. It's like downhill skiing. You go *whoosh!* And if you don't get there you do it again. It's not one moment, or one performance. It's 'Will I make it at the end of the day?' " ♦

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OUR MAN IN PYONGYANG

Bobby Egan's barbecue diplomacy.

BY REBECCA MEAD

Cubby's, a barbecue restaurant in Hackensack, New Jersey, is on an undistinguished strip of discount stores and parking lots not far from Costco and the Bergen County Courthouse. It would be within sight of the Bergen County Jail, if the jail had better sight lines. Amid such surroundings, Cubby's stands out. The parking lot is elaborately landscaped, with thick beds of pink and white impatiens, grassy banks, and well-placed evergreen shrubs, in the manner of a suburban funeral home. Inside, the place is half steak house, half burger joint, with reproduction Tiffany lamps suspended over Formica tables, and gilt-edged mirrors hanging near framed snapshots of sports celebrities and clippings from local newspapers lauding the ribs. On one wall, an enormous mural depicts the skyline of downtown Manhattan with the World Trade Center intact. Customers place orders at the front counter; behind it, on a board, is the menu, which ranges from hot dogs to twenty-seven-dollar T-bone steaks. A hand-painted sign showing a dyspeptic pig in a chef's hat hangs next to a placard that reads "Where's the pork?"

At lunchtime, the place is full of regulars: local businessmen and lawyers from the courthouse, all of whom the proprietor, Robert Egan, greets with a clap on the back or a hearty "What's up, bro?" Egan, who is forty-nine and is known as Bobby, is of Irish descent on his father's side and Italian on his mother's. He is more than six feet tall and burly, with a shock of black hair. He has dark eyes, incipient jowls, and a manner that can change in a moment from expansively genial to theatrically menacing. If you were casting a local television commercial for a Union City car dealership and needed someone who could evoke Robert De Niro in his fleshier, mid-career period, Bobby Egan would be your man.

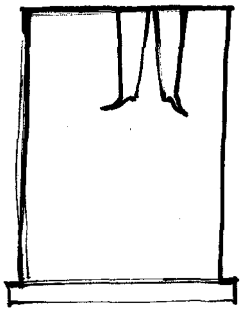
Egan, who has run Cubby's for twenty-five years, is well known in Hackensack, though not solely for the quality of his ribs. For nearly fifteen years, he has served as a kind of unofficial ambassador—a go-between and a gofer—for the government of North Korea. He is, as he puts it, "Kim Jong Il's guy in New Jersey." Dozens of photographs on his restaurant walls offer testimony to Egan's improbable involvement in international diplomacy. Among the pictures of friendly Giants and Yankees are several images of besuited, slightly ill-at-ease-looking Asian men posing at Cubby's. "That's Minister Han, before he became Ambassador here," Egan said to me, pointing to a youthful, bespectacled man in a blue suit. (Han Song Ryol, who joined North Korea's U.N. delegation in 1993, ended his tenure as Ambassador last year and returned to Pyongyang.) "And that's Ambassador Ho Jong." (Ho left his post in 1994.) In another photograph, a gentleman with the same black hair and grin as Egan stands with a beaming young female athlete, Kye Sun Hui. "That's my dad at the Atlanta Olympics, in '96," Egan said. "She won the judo title when she was just sixteen. She's a hero in North Korea. She still asks about me."

In one corner of the restaurant is a photograph showing a dreary skyline, shot from what looks like a viewing platform. "That's Pyongyang," Egan said. "That's when they gave me my pin." The pin to which he refers bears an image of Kim Il Sung, the father of North Korea's Stalinist state, who died in 1994, and whose son is Kim Jong Il, its current leader. North Koreans wear similar pins as a sign of respect for their head of state. Egan keeps his pin in a

Egan at his restaurant, Cubby's, in Hackensack. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

small, cluttered back office at Cubby's. "I'm told there are only two Westerners that have pins—me and some guy from Romania," Egan said. "I got the pin at the end of my first trip. They inducted me into their family. They said, 'You are part of us.' I thought, When in Rome, I'm Roman."

Above a corner booth at Cubby's is a clipping from the front page of the *Times*, dated November 3, 2002, with the headline "NORTH KOREA SAYS NUCLEAR PROGRAM CAN BE NEGOTIATED." (At the time, North Korea—formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or D.P.R.K.—was still three years away from announcing that it had detonated a nuclear device.) Ambassador Han is quoted as saying that his country was willing to dismantle its secret uranium-enrichment facilities, in spite of having been branded by President George W. Bush, in that year's State of the Union address, as a member of "an Axis of Evil." The Ambassador, the article recounts, had asked to be interviewed by the paper: "The North Korean Mission contacted the *Times* through a New Jersey restaurateur, Robert Egan, who is the chairman of a trade group that has worked to improve ties between the United States and North Korea." Egan, explaining his identification in the newspaper of record, said, "You have to have a reason to move around in a country like that, so the North Koreans made me the president of the U.S.A.-D.P.R.K. Trade Council, or some president of some trade council."



Egan first travelled to North Korea in 1994. He says that he has made "between four and six" visits since then. He has never met Kim Jong Il, who is highly reclusive, and whose political intentions and personal tastes—including a reported fondness for slasher films, luxury cars, and basketball—have been the subject of much speculation in the West. "I was on the same platform as Kim Jong Il when I got that pin," Egan told me. "But he was up there, and I was down here. It would be very difficult for me to sit down with him or meet him, because they keep him very isolated." Egan says that he respects Kim as a leader, just as he respects Bush as a leader, although there are important differences between the two men. "Put it this way, O.K.? I'd rather have George Bush mad at me than Kim Jong Il," Egan said one day at Cubby's, leaning confidentially over the table. "I have no problem with George Bush coming in the restaurant and yelling and screaming at me. I would sleep real good that night. I wouldn't want to get His Excellency Kim Jong Il angry. I wouldn't sleep well that night."

Egan is confident that, for many years, his actions have met with the approval of the North Korean regime, despite his occasional disregard for subtlety. Four years ago, when the North Korean women's soccer team was in the United States for the Women's World Cup, Egan popped up again in the *Times;* on this occasion, he was serving as the squad's outspoken chef. He had also attempted, unsuccessfully, to secure the sponsorship of a sports-drink company. "To demonstrate the incendiary power of the North Korean team," the *Times* reported, Egan "said he suggested a commercial featuring a nuclear explosion that would occur as a player struck the ball."

When the story appeared, the soccer team was practicing at a camp in rural Pennsylvania, and Ambassador Han was visiting. "My father called me and said, 'You had better get every New York *Times* in that town out of there,'" Egan recalled. "So we went around and got all the *Timeses*. Usually, the Ambassador reads the New York *Times* on Sunday, and he said to me, 'I can't find the *Times* anywhere.' I had them all stacked up in my room—a hundred of them." Egan was, however, unable to pull off a complete coverup. "Two days later, Ambassador Han comes up to me at the soccer camp and said, 'A nuclear explosion with a soccer ball? In the middle of a nuclear crisis?' And he just looked at me. He said, 'I sent the paper back to Pyongyang,' and walked away. Two days later, I am sitting on the side of a scrimmage, and here comes Han. I thought, I'm getting my walking papers. But he said, 'Pyongyang and our generals *loved* it. You stand for strength, and that's strength. Let everybody know we have nuclear weapons!' They thought it was great."

Precisely how Bobby Egan came to be a liaison with the North Koreans is something of a mystery. He certainly does not have the pedigree of Christopher Hill, President Bush's top negotiator in the current six-party talks with North Korea, in Beijing. (These negotiations, which have taken place on and off for the past four years, have touched on many issues, from the future of North Korea's nuclear program to the possibility of restoring diplomatic relations with the United States.) Hill was educated at Bowdoin and the Naval War College, and speaks half a dozen languages. "Anybody I'm associated with, we're a bit out there, O.K.?" Egan told me one day at his restaurant. "We're not type-A personalities. We might be a Y or a Z."

Egan was raised in Fairfield, New Jersey, which is a twenty-minute drive west of Hackensack. His father was a roofing contractor. "I had a very tough upbringing," he recalled. "In my town, we grew up knowing that if you hurt someone you are going to get hurt back, period. You are not going to go into counselling. They are not going to look into your childhood. You are going to get your ass busted." He graduated from West Essex Senior High School in 1976, even though he barely attended class. Michael Nigro, who has been a friend of Egan's since third grade, said, "I don't think they were ever going to fail us, because they just wanted us out. We went as far as hanging our teacher by his feet—we stood up on top of the desk and shook him—until he changed our grade to a C. That's how we passed English."

By his mid-teens, Egan was working at the local trapshooting range, setting up clay pigeons and doing other odd jobs. The clientele, he said, included some "bad guys." In Fairfield, he explained, "there is very little distance between good guys and bad guys. We are all friends. We all grew up together." Egan says that from an early age he was approached by F.B.I. agents. "They would say, 'Are you going to help us out?,' and I would say, 'No, I'm not going to help you out,' and they would say, 'You're going to get jammed up

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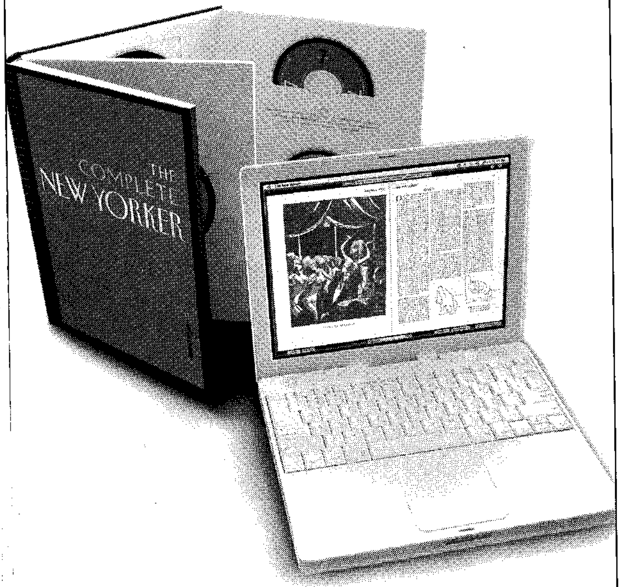

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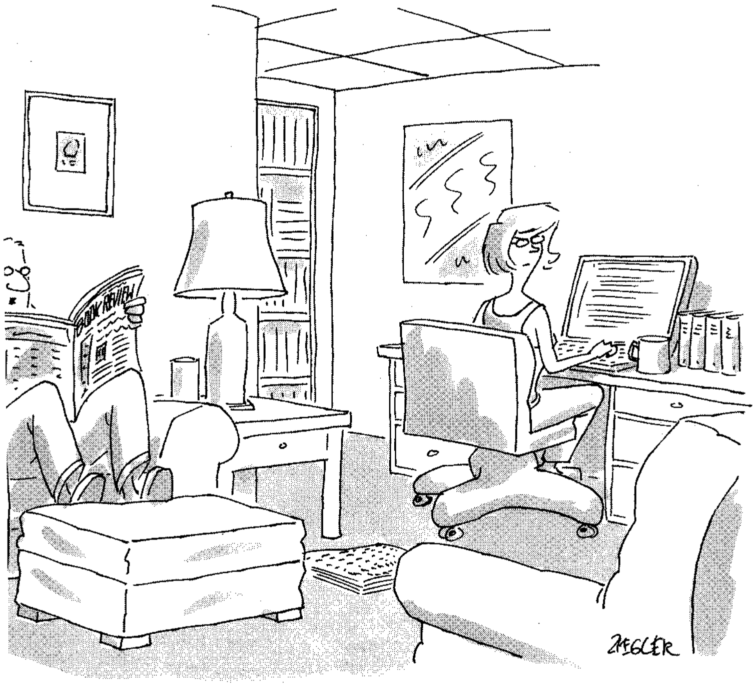


“Joyce Carol Oates seems to have no trouble coming out with book after book.”

• •

“The first day we opened, we’d forgotten pots. We ack to my house to get the I had. Being Italian, I had ni pot, but that was all.” At ’s served only hot dogs, rgers. Egan was an eager, if erratic, businessman, ac- Mrs. Wehrle. “Working vas very difficult,” she said. o out and buy a case of fro- because they were a bar- weren’t selling chickens. a bargain if you are selling

ars ago, Egan bought out mily. He now has a staff of l says that Cubby’s serves e hundred people a day. A ence behind the counter is ho is the mother of Egan’s s, and whom he refers to as couple have been separated ar.

Egan never served in Viet- ained obsessed with the hbor of mine went over- en he came back he was a son,” Egan told me. “He a loner, more aggressive. e it in their eyes—there was some type of loss in their eyes. Something was missing.” He recalled Nixon’s statement, in 1973, that all P.O.W.s were on their way home, and doubted its veracity. “I’d studied Vietnam on my own, and I knew it was factional—there was no big government controlling Vietnam but there were ethnic groups that were switching week to week. I had an interest in this that needed to be resolved.”

Egan took his interest to unconventional lengths: he called up the Vietnamese mission to the United Nations, paid a visit, and said that he wanted to establish a friendship. “They come from a poor nation, they are underfunded over here, and they are probably pretty goddam lonely so many thousands of miles away from home,” he said. “So now they are over here, they ain’t got a goddam thing to do when the U.N. is closed, and they ain’t got no money. No-brainer! I could bring a stray dog in there and they would get along. And I am bringing the bag of tricks—ball-games, racetracks, fishing trips, lunches, dinners. And there ain’t a line of people waiting to do that. If you had five dollars and you had all weekend to do nothing, and I came along,

"Damn—you're right. It is 'I' before 'E.'"

you'd want to hang out with me, too."

According to Egan, he became an "unofficial secretary" to the mission, and gradually began to discuss his concerns about P.O.W.s with Ambassador Nguyen Can, who, he said, told him that his government had held P.O.W.s at the end of the war who might still be alive in Laos. (Nguyen Can was eventually recalled to Vietnam, and no P.O.W.s were released.)

Another Vietnamese national whom Egan befriended was Le Quang Khai, who had served for eleven years at the foreign ministry in Hanoi. Le was in the United States on a student visa to do graduate work at Columbia University. In September of 1992, Le defected, telling reporters that it was well known in the Vietnamese government that American P.O.W.s had been held after the war. That October, an article appeared in *USA Today*, in which Le said that he felt like a "hunted man" for speaking out about the possible existence of P.O.W.s in Vietnam and Laos. Le, the article noted, "became involved with the P.O.W./M.I.A. community through the work of Bob Egan, a New Jersey restaurateur and activist."

Shortly thereafter, Le and Egan testified before a Senate select committee on P.O.W./M.I.A. affairs. John McCreary, a senior intelligence analyst with the Defense Intelligence Agency, who was an investigator for the select committee, took depositions from both Le and Egan. "I never did figure out how Bobby made his connection with the Vietnamese, but he did—the connection was genuine," McCreary, who is now retired, says. "His story was hard to believe, but it bore out. He walked into the Vietnamese Embassy because he wanted to 'help out,' or something preposterous like that." In his deposition, Egan said that he had travelled to Vietnam on a number of occasions, in an effort to gain more information on P.O.W.s. "I was always talking about live Americans to them," Egan told McCreary. "A common saying of mine is 'If you killed them, you'd better breathe some life into them, because you'll never get what you want unless we get live guys back.'"

That Christmas Eve, Egan was on his way to his mother's house when, he says, he was approached by immigration agents. "They came up to me and the guy said, 'Merry Christmas, Mr. Egan,' and he handed me the denial of Le's request for political asylum," Egan says. "He says, 'They're sending him back to Vietnam.'" Egan drew media attention to Le's case, and eventually asylum was granted. Egan said of the immigration official, "That's one guy I wish I hit. I wish I broke his fucking jaw. That's the only guy in my life that I didn't hit and wished I had."

Egan's eagerness to take justice into his own hands, and his selective disregard for the channels through which justice is conventionally dispensed, has landed him in trouble many times. "I ain't running for President," he said. "Believe me, I'm no angel. But I am not a thief. I'm not a tax cheat. I don't hijack things." People close to Egan are used to his inflammatory nature. "We have bumped heads every day of our lives," Michael Nigro told me. "We were in Wyoming hunting once, and we were in a restaurant and we had a fight, an argument that was so bad we got kicked out. It was the only restaurant around. After that, we had to drive forty miles to eat." Egan's official record, though, is only slightly grubby. Although he admits to having been thrown in jail a few times, he has no felony convictions. As a young man, he was convicted on a misdemeanor: "We were all drunk and we parked out in a lot, and my dog's running over to the firewood pile and bringing us firewood back, and we're throwing the firewood in the pickup truck," Egan said. "And we got arrested for taking firewood off the lot. My hunting dog did it. And I took the rap for it."

Egan has been involved in various legal fights and has had long-running disputes with the police. In 1996, he filed a federal civil-rights suit against the City of Hackensack, claiming that police officers had come into his restaurant expecting free food, and that he had been pressured to hire off-duty cops as security for events that he was holding at Cubby's. The suit also claimed that he had been choked, punched, and attacked with Mace or pepper spray by police officers whom he called to his restaurant after a customer had become disruptive. Egan's larger claims of being targeted by the police were dismissed, but, in 2000, the city paid him three hundred thousand dollars to settle the charges relating to the brawl. "The city paid me three hundred thousand dollars because they arrested me for no reason," he told me.

In August of 2001, Egan was indicted on assault and bias charges after three West African customers claimed that he had refused to serve them at

Cubby's, had used racial slurs in addressing them, and had engaged them in a fight in the parking lot. Egan, who denied the charges, launched a campaign against Kimberly Holmes, the assistant prosecutor in the case. He posted a message on the electronic-zipper sign in front of his restaurant, declaring Holmes a winner of Cubby's "first annual Pork Butt award." He also rented a plane that flew above the statehouse in Trenton with a banner streaming behind it that read "Prosecutor Kim Holmes: Stop the Lies." A closed-circuit videotape of the incident showed that Egan had repeatedly attempted to take the customers' orders, and had made no racial slurs; charges were later dropped. "I was the one that got jumped, and there were fourteen witnesses that seen me jumped," he says. "*They* were threatening *me*. They paid for it. I know how to defend myself."

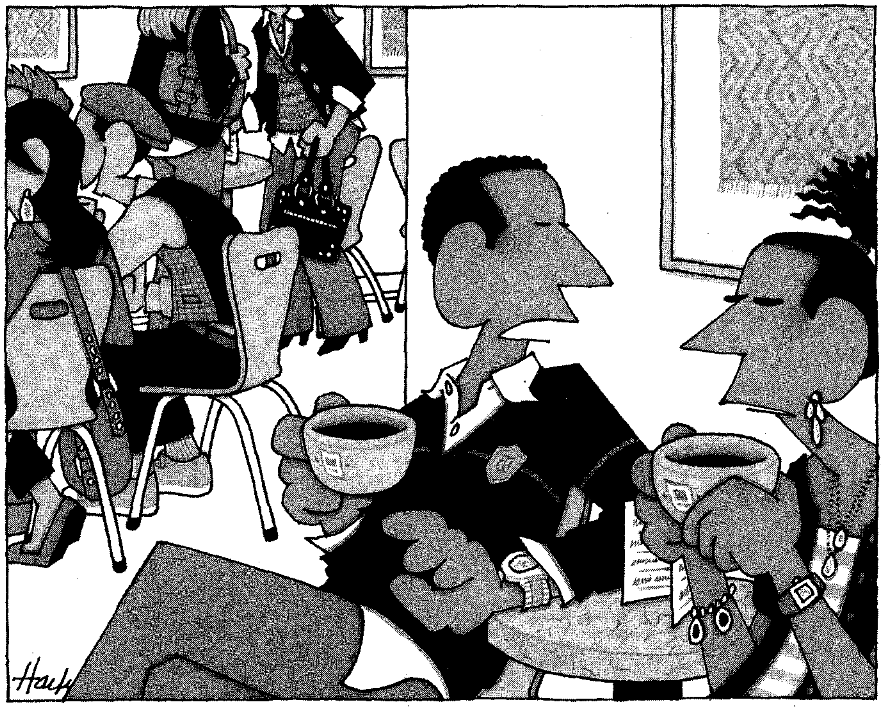
Egan believes in the effectiveness of well-placed violence. "I don't believe in hurting people unless they are going to hurt you. And if they are going to hurt you and your family, or your country, then eat them for dinner," Egan said over lunch one day at the Cheesecake Factory in Hackensack. (Egan, who would like to lose about fifteen pounds, ordered a Chinese chicken salad.) "That's my belief—an eye for an eye," he added. "Then the whole world will be blind? Well, that's why they've got eye surgery." Egan is a patriot of a particularly vivid stripe, and, having been denied a chance to fight for his country in Vietnam, he declares himself more than ready to kill for it, should duty call. "If you told me that to get bin Laden I'd have to physically eat him for dinner—his whole body—I'd say, 'Well, we've got a lot of barbecue sauce. Let's barbecue him.'"

In the early nineties, as Vietnam and the United States began restoring diplomatic ties, Egan's contacts at the Vietnamese mission told him that North Korean officials in New York were looking for someone who might help ease them toward better relations with the U.S. The Vietnamese suggested Egan. "There were no other options for the Koreans," he said. "They said, 'You're all that we've got. Would you work with us?' And I said yes."

Egan told the North Korean diplomats that they needed to present themselves as less secretive, and in 1994 he invited them to make a rare public appearance—at Cubby's. The North Koreans came and met with members of the Giants, then went to a Nets game and toured the locker room. (The Bergen County *Record* covered the event: "North Korean officials seeking to end an impasse over inspections of their country's nuclear facilities took time out from their negotiations this week to eat steak in Hackensack.") And during the 1996 Summer Olympics, in Atlanta, Egan arranged for a contingent of North Korean officials to stay with volunteers for an organization called the National Alliance for the Return of America's Missing Servicemen. Dolores Alfond, the group's leader, recalled, "We had four or five different officials and their wives, and we more or less tried to entertain them and to emphasize that we were interested in our prisoners of war."

In the mid-nineties, Egan began to forge ties with Han Song Ryol, the North Korean diplomat who eventually became an ambassador. In Han, Egan seems to have found an unlikely kindred spirit. "Han's my brother. You understand that?" he says. "I'd die for that man. I won't betray my country for him, but I'd take a bullet for him without a question." On one occasion when I was at Cubby's, the younger of Egan's two daughters, who is nine, happened to be in the restaurant, and Egan called her over. "Where's my kissy?" Egan said, pulling her close. He then asked, "Who's your uncle?" She replied, with a toss of the head, "If I must say it for the millionth time—Uncle Han." (Han could not be reached in North Korea. But the friendliness of his dealings with Egan may be inferred from a letter that he sent Egan in 1995, concerning flood damage suffered in North Korea, in which he addresses Egan informally, if imperfectly, as "Boby.")

Like Egan, Han was a tough guy, if a much smaller and better-educated one. One day, Han reluctantly admitted that he had a toothache, and so Egan sent him to an oral surgeon. "The dentist tells me, 'Well, yeah, he's got a toothache. *All* his teeth ache. We're going to have to pull them all out and give him implants,' " Egan recalled. "I told Han and he said, 'I'm North Korean, you understand that? You know how tough we are? So when I said I had a toothache, it means that all my teeth are rotten, I got gum disease, and I have to have them all pulled out. What did you think, that I would complain about one tooth, like



"I'm sorry. I was so busy listening to myself talk that I forgot what I was saying."

you?’” Han underwent the surgery, requesting that Egan stay in the room with him. “I don’t know how many teeth he pulled, but I think he pulled most of them out in one shot,” Egan told me. “They went at it, man. It was gross.” After the surgery, Egan said, Han insisted on going to Cubby’s for lunch. “We sat down, and I said, ‘You want some mashed potatoes?’” Egan said. “He looked me up and down and he says, ‘Put a rack of ribs on.’ And he sat there and ate a rack of ribs. Then Han said, ‘Now go and get my prescription for the infection. Don’t worry about the pain medication—I don’t want you to spend money on that.’ So I came back and I’m giving it to him and he says, ‘I told you not to get the pain medicine.’ I said, ‘Minister Han, please take it.’ But he said, ‘I don’t want it.’ And now he’s got a Hollywood smile.” (John Kallis, the surgeon who performed the extractions, said that he and Han became so friendly that he invited Han to his daughter’s sweet-sixteen party. Han sent a gift.)

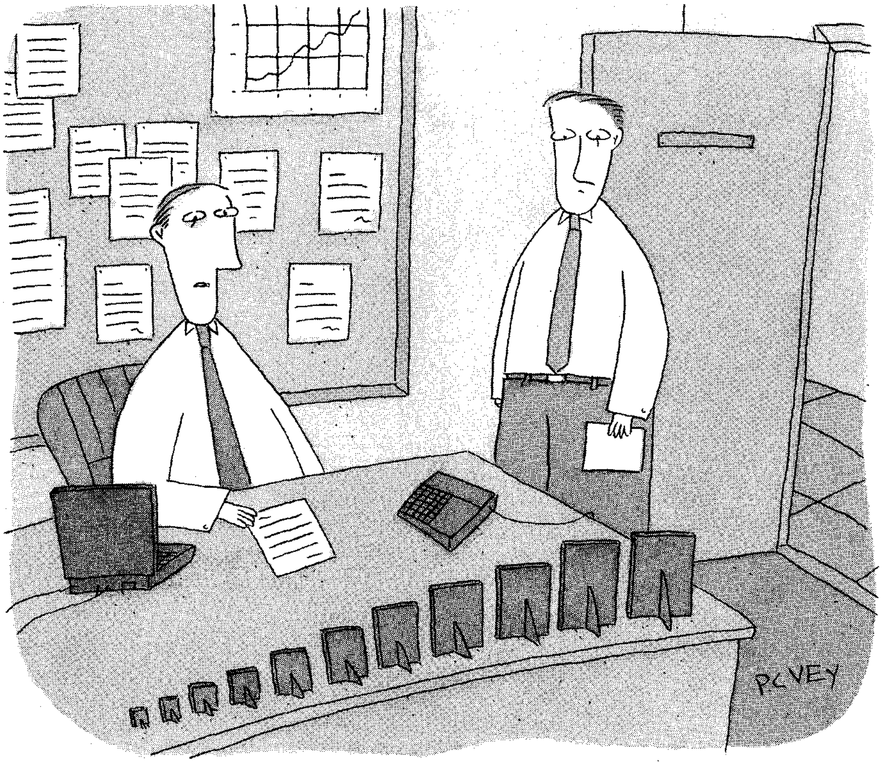
According to Egan, he and Han used to joke about having the opportunity to fight each other if it came to war between the U.S. and North Korea. “I said to him, ‘When I get to you, I am going to yank all those teeth out with pliers before I kill you,’” Egan recalled. “He laughed and said, ‘You don’t even want to know what I’m going to do to you.’”

Egan’s interactions with the North Koreans in New York sometimes took the form of trout-fishing expeditions and pheasant-hunting trips in New Jersey. “I don’t play golf and I don’t play bridge,” Egan said. “Nor do the North Koreans.” The group was joined by Michael Nigro, Egan’s swamp-survivalist buddy, who says that, at least five times, he took North Koreans to the hunting club and the fishing club to which he belongs. On these excursions, Egan also took along Michael O’Donovan, a retired police captain and the head of a small private security firm, who has worked in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq, El Salvador, and Israel. Depending on the size of the North Korean party, O’Donovan told me, he engaged between two and six employees—each equipped with a rifle, a shotgun, and a handgun—to insure the North Koreans’ personal safety.

Egan made his first trip to North Korea in 1994, accompanied by Dave Bratton, a minister. At the time, Bratton was a volunteer chaplain for the Giants; Egan had come to know him in the early nineties, when he undertook Bible study with Bratton. Egan said, “Kim Jong Il sent word down asking why did I bring Bratton, and I said in case he didn’t like me or passed harsh judgment on me I would have a priest to give me my last rites. They got a big kick out of that.” (Egan, during this period, was “a seeker,” Bratton recalled. He was raised Catholic, and aspires to more religiosity than he achieves. “I’m a foxhole guy,” Egan told me. “When I’ve got my heart broken or I’m on somebody’s hit list, that’s when I get down and pray.”) Bratton said that they were taken to the sights of Pyongyang, including the tomb of Kim Il Sung. “Everybody is supposed to take a bouquet of flowers and put it at Kim Il Sung’s grave and bow,” he said. “I was saying to Bobby, ‘What do I do now?’ And he said, ‘You do what I do.’ I started to bow, and I felt Bobby’s hand on my arm. Then I saw him nod his head right down and back up.”

Egan said that nothing he’d ever seen had prepared him for North Korea: “I had been in some isolated nations before—in Hanoi before we had diplomatic relations, in villages in Laos—but I have never seen isolation like I have seen in North Korea. I knew I was in a special place.” Egan said that he was allowed to go jogging in the streets of Pyongyang, where the virtual absence of cars makes for some of the cleanest urban air in Asia. And he says that he even went inside Pyongyang’s most distinctive and embarrassing attraction, the Ryugyong Hotel, a pyramidal poured-concrete structure, a hundred and five stories tall, which was started in the nineteen-eighties and never completed, because of structural problems. Egan said, “They didn’t want to take me in it, but I said, ‘Listen, we all make mistakes. But if the architect’s body is hanging in there I don’t want to see it.’ ”

Egan also visited the North Korean countryside, which made Pyongyang look prosperous by comparison. On one visit, not long after the devastating famine the country suffered in the mid-nineties, Egan thought that there might be an opportunity for him to engage in his favorite pastime. “I was travelling on a train, and it would stop often because it ran out of electricity, and so I’d get out and look at the different villages, which were very remote and impoverished,” he



“They grow up so fast.”

KARMELICKA

Karmelicka Street, a sky-blue tram, the sun,
September, the first day after vacation,
some have come home from long trips,
armored divisions enter Poland,
children off to school dressed in their best,
white and navy blue, like sails and sea,
like memory and grapes and inspiration.
The trees stand at attention, honoring
the power of young minds that haven't yet
known fire and sleep and can do what they want,
nothing can stop them
(not counting invisible limits).

The trees greet the young respectfully,
but you—be truthful—envy
that starting out, that setting off
from home, from childhood, from the sweet darkness
that tastes of almonds, raisins, and poppyseeds,
you stop in the store for bread
and then walk home, unhurried,
whistling and humming carelessly;
your school still hasn't started,
the teachers have gone, the masters remain,
distant as summer, your sleep sails through the clouds
across the sky.

—*Adam Zagajewski*

(*Translated, from the Polish, by Clare Cavanagh.*)

told me. "I noticed that in every cornfield there were deer stands—a raised stand, with a guard. I said, 'I like to hunt. Why don't you take me hunting?' And they said, 'What are you talking about, Bobby? They're not deer stands. They're guards protecting the corn from people coming out in the middle of the night and stealing it.' And I took a deep breath."

In 1996, Egan went to North Korea with Captain Eugene (Red) McDaniel, a naval officer who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam from 1967 to 1973. Both men believed that North Korea might be holding American P.O.W.s. When they wanted to do research in Pyongyang's military archives, a North Korean official suggested that the party enter through the back door, and Egan took him to task for paying insufficient respect to an American war hero. They entered through the front door. Egan told me, "McDaniel said, 'Six years in Vietnam, and I never, ever thought that I wouldn't get out, but I am not so sure about this. You don't have to stick up for me—it's O.K. They can disrespect me a bit.'" McDaniel, who is now seventy-six years old, confirmed Egan's account, and said of him, "I was very impressed with his ability to deal with officials at the highest level of government." The two men failed to bring home any P.O.W.s, however. "I came back empty-handed," McDaniel said. "We did not achieve anything."

In his capacity as the head of the U.S.A.-D.P.R.K. Trade Council, Egan investigated the possibility of helping the North Koreans establish some rudimentary industries, such as food and fertilizer production. He showed me a draft of a letter that he said he sent to the U.S. Treasury Department, requesting a license to operate a poultry farm in North Korea. The initial plan, he said, was to supply eggs and chickens at the site of two light-water reactors that, in 1994, the U.S. had agreed to help build in North Korea, in exchange for Korea shutting down its nuclear program. (The agreement fell apart, and the light-water reactors were never built. Neither was the poultry farm.)

Egan says that he even considered going into business in North Korea. He says that the North Koreans asked if he would open a branch of Cubby's at the light-water-reactor site, after he had helped them in the 1994 negotiations. "They took me up to the site and they said, 'In honor of your hard work, and our recognition of what you have done for us, we bring you up here, and we want you to build a Cubby's restaurant. And your government is going to see for the duration of this project that it was your involvement that got this done.' I couldn't believe it. I was in tears. Of course, it was impossible for me to do. I said, 'I don't have the money,' because one thing I know is that in North Korea you don't make money. They take the money. As good a friend as I can be, they'll take the money." Though he didn't extend his barbecue franchise, Egan continued to ingratiate himself with the regime. In a letter dated March 11, 1997, Kim Hyong U, North Korea's Permanent Representative and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, offered to Egan his "deep gratitude . . . for your felicitation to our great leader comrade Kim Jong Il on the occasion of his fifty-fifth birth anniversary."

Egan also became involved with bringing humanitarian supplies to North Korea and verifying that they were distributed properly. On two occasions, he was accompanied to Pyongyang by Stewart Greenleaf, a state senator from Pennsylvania. "We carried humanitarian aid with us on the plane, and had some of it shipped—baby food, medicines, vitamins," Greenleaf said. On the first trip, he and Egan visited a hospital in Pyongyang to insure that their aid shipment had arrived. While there, they were invited into an operating room to witness minor surgery. "The patient was awake, and he had his coat on, because it was so cold," Greenleaf recalled. Egan got into an argument with North Korean officials on that trip, too. Egan and Greenleaf were at the Beijing airport, en route to Pyongyang; North Korean customs officials demanded that Greenleaf pay a substantial tariff on the medical supplies he was bringing into the country. But, after strong words were exchanged, Egan and Greenleaf got through without paying anything.

Through Greenleaf, Egan made the acquaintance of William A. Henry, who heads a faith-based humanitarian organization, America's Heart, which, according to Henry, has shipped "everything from ambulances to food supplies" to North Korea. "Between the D.P.R.K. and ourselves, Egan is a liaison," Henry said. "He is a known and trusted individual to the North Koreans. He is someone they can relate to."

After I'd spent some time talking with Egan about his exploits, he decided that it was time I witnessed for myself the intimacy of his relationship with the North Koreans. That evening, he said, he would be going to New York for a meeting, and he wanted to confirm the details. We were driving in his car: a black Hummer equipped with a radar detector, and packed with fishing equipment and a shooting target made from stuffed sackcloth. Egan hit the speed dial on the car's cell-phone extension. "My Minister! How are you?" he said when a man with a Korean accent picked up—apparently, Minister Kim Myong Gil, a top official at the North Korean mission. "I'll see you tonight, O.K.? Probably seven-thirty, no later than eight, O.K.?"

"O.K.," said the voice on the phone.

"How's everything? O.K.? How's the soccer?" Egan asked, speaking of the 2007 Women's World Cup, which took place last month in China. "Hey, if I go to Beijing, you give me tickets for the soccer match, O.K.?"

"I don't have the tickets."

"How about your Embassy over there? The girls want to see me, I know that," Egan said.

This elicited a laugh. "The Chinese have all the control."

"Well, you've got to call the Chinese Embassy," Egan said. "Tell them Mr. Bobby needs a couple of tickets, and I got to support your girls."

"O.K.," the voice said, agreeably.

"All right. See you later," Egan said, with a broad grin.

A little before eight that evening, I met Egan on the East Side of Manhattan, a few blocks from the United Nations. We walked down Second Avenue, from the parking lot where Egan had left his Hummer to the nondescript office building at Forty-fourth Street where the North Koreans have their offices. Egan, who was wearing jeans and a red sports shirt, flashed an I.D. at the building's security guard—giving the impression that he was a cop, without exactly saying as much—and strode into the elevator. "Guess what floor they're on?" he said. "Thirteen." We went down a corridor, and Egan knocked on a door marked with a sign for the D.P.R.K. A man in a suit opened the door a handbreadth and peered out, without showing a glimmer of recognition.

"I'm here to see Minister Kim," Egan said. "Tell him it's Robert Egan. Mr. Bobby." The man disappeared, shutting the door, and reappeared a few moments later.

"He's not here," he reported, shiftily. "They finished work. He will be back in the morning."

Egan and I descended to Second Avenue, Egan shaking his head. "Something's up," he said. The man at the mission, he explained, was a new guy. Egan pulled out his cell phone and dialled Kim's number. "Where you at, bro?" he said when the phone was answered. "I thought we had a meeting." He listened, then said, "I understand, I understand. So you'll come out to lunch at the restaurant tomorrow? O.K., see you then." Egan snapped the phone shut and told me that Kim had been delayed. "Maybe he had a meeting, or someone came and offered to take them out to dinner," he speculated. "Or maybe they were testing me, getting me to come out all this way just to see if I would do it."

I got in a cab to go home, and a few minutes later my cell phone rang. It was Egan. "I don't want you to think I've ever overstated my role with them," he said. "I'm the guy who sits under the table, picking up the scraps."

The next morning, I took a cab through the Lincoln Tunnel into Union City—past the sign welcoming me to "The Embroidery Capital of the World"—and made the fifteen-minute trip to Cubby's. Egan assured me that the North Koreans were coming. He installed me in a rear booth, and I ordered lunch. Within minutes, a piece of grilled chicken big enough for two, and smothered with sweet sauce, was delivered to my table. Not long afterward, two Korean gentlemen, dressed in business attire, entered the restaurant and were greeted warmly by Egan.

"What'll you have? Steak?" he asked, and told them to take the table at the back. The men sat down a few feet from me, under another mural that Egan had commissioned, which shows him—in a slightly slimmer incarnation—standing soberly at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, examining the engraved names; ghostly images of P.O.W.s are reflected in the granite.

After a few minutes, Egan joined his guests, and they talked for forty-five minutes or so. Apparently, one of the Koreans was Minister Kim. I could hear Egan's booming voice quite clearly, as could, probably, half the other customers. They talked about the quality of the steak, which Kim thought had improved since his last visit. "Last time, you were a counsellor, you just got the sliced steak, but now you're Minister—you get the T-bone!" Egan told Kim. The Koreans expressed an interest in going fishing for trout, and Egan said that he'd bring along Michael O'Donovan; at the mention of this name, Kim pretended to shoot a gun.

Egan asked how the talks in Beijing were going, and urged the Koreans to press for a visit to Pyongyang by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. He told Kim that he was ready to make another trip to Pyongyang himself. "Take me off the bench, coach," he said. They joked about the U.S.S. Pueblo, the spy ship that was captured by the North Koreans in 1968. Egan said that he would give the Koreans five Hummers in exchange for the Pueblo; the Koreans laughed.

"You figure out what you will make over the next ten years charging tourists ten dollars to see it," Egan said. "The tourists you will get—five Hummers will be worth more than that." One of the Koreans made a counteroffer, and Egan laughed. "Ten million?" he said. "Scrap value! I'll give you scrap value!"

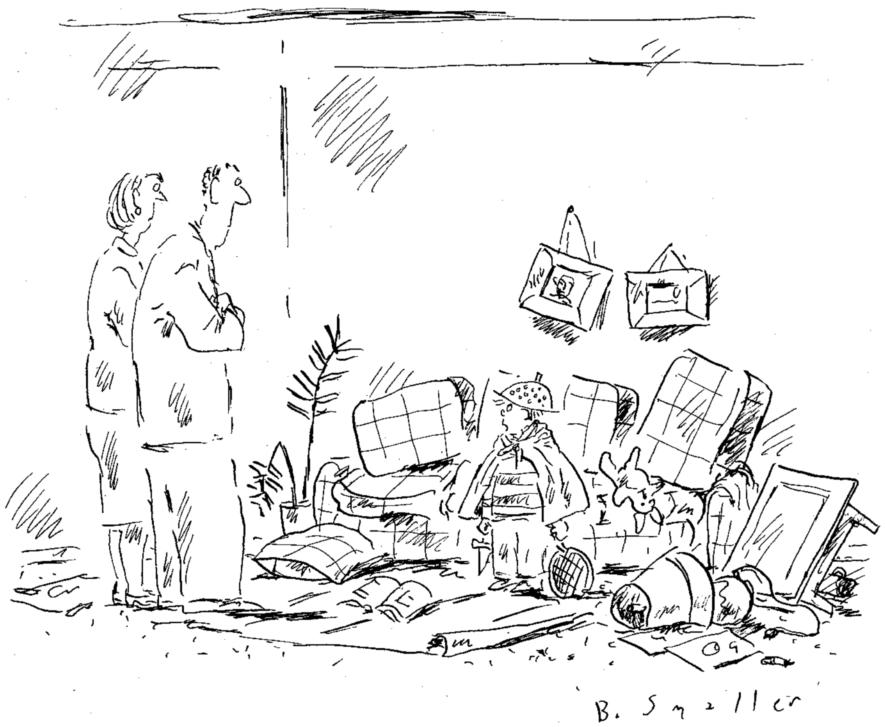
Although Egan's most tangible accomplishment in North Korea may be his efforts on behalf of humanitarian agencies, he lays claim to another, more unlikely role: as an unofficial analyst and policy adviser to the North Koreans. The North Koreans are not well

MIRACLE MOM #5,293:
LIFTED CROSSTOWN BUS TO SAVE CHILD'S GENERIC-BRAND, IMITATION-BUTTER-FLAVORED, SALIVA-SOAKED COOKIE.
R. Chast

schooled in the nuances of American culture, Egan said. He claims that he helps the North Koreans parse American statements and actions, and offers his own suggestions about how they might respond. His interpretive role is semantic, not linguistic. Egan does not speak Korean—"I asked them once, 'You going to teach me?,' and they said, 'Listen, you have a hard enough time with English' "—and says that his North Korean associates prefer that he remain in the dark so that they can talk privately in his presence.

One of the quirks of Egan's relationship with the North Koreans is that even as he was befriending them he was also informing American intelligence agencies of their activities. The North Koreans, he says, were well aware that he was doing this. In a photograph that hangs on the wall of Cubby's, Egan, in a chef's jacket, is standing behind a group of Asian men who are posing for the camera. Egan appears to be reaching for something on one of the men's backs. He told me that he was grabbing a piece of hair so that the American intelligence authorities could analyze it and determine what medications the official was taking, and whether he was a blood relative of any other North Korean diplomats on whom they had data. (The F.B.I. declined to confirm whether or not Egan has ever had a role with the agency. However, he showed me a copy of his F.B.I. file, which ran to many pages. Much of it was redacted, but it confirms that information has been obtained from him.) "When the Koreans are talking to our government, like they are now, and when things are this good, the last person you want to be around, if you are on the U.S. side, is me," Egan told me. " 'Thank you, go home.' But, when things are difficult, there is nobody else to come to. But the North Koreans have a different relationship with me. They want me in the good times and the bad."

Egan says that the North Koreans are a much misunderstood people. They want normalized relations with the United States, a trading partnership, and aid, he says; they also want the United States not to interfere with any reunification process with South Korea, and for remaining U.S. troops to leave the D.M.Z. His efforts on the North Koreans' behalf, he says, have always been aimed toward a peaceful end that would benefit both countries. As he put it, "How can you have fifty years of no diplomatic relations, no low-level diplomatic talks with a country that shares a peninsula with one of our best allies, South Korea, and that borders our biggest economic adversary and military adversary, China? How could that be?" Egan says that the very fact that the North Koreans choose to work with a guy like him shows how badly they want to get out of the hole of isolation in which they have buried themselves. "Look at what lengths the Koreans would go to—by using a guy with as little credibility as me, because there was nobody else there to support them," he says. "That's how much



"Can't you just relax and enjoy my childhood?"

they wanted to normalize relations—that's how much they wanted economic ties. They stooped to that level."

After President Bush characterized North Korea as belonging to the Axis of Evil, and relations between the two countries arrived at a stalemate over North Korea's effort to become a nuclear power, Egan says that he offered his counsel. "I told the Koreans, 'Don't give up—things will work out. Let's just keep on the path,'" he says. When it became clear that the war in Iraq was not going to conclude with a quick American triumph, Egan claims, he laid out for the North Koreans the possible outcomes—scenarios that Kim Jong Il, who reportedly enjoys watching Western television news, might well have foreseen himself. "I said one of two things is going to happen," Egan told me. "Bush is not going to get reëlected, and we have another shot, or he is going to get reëlected and continue the war, and he is going to be fucked, as far as foreign policy goes—because he will have turned the whole world against him. So what does that do for us? It makes North Korea the only chance of a foreign-policy success."

Even more surprisingly, Egan claims that last year, when relations between the U.S. and North Korea appeared to have reached yet another impasse, he counselled the North Koreans to be more demonstrative. "I said, 'I think you have to bring it up to another level,'" he told me. "I said, 'Forget all this war rhetoric and all this crap. Don't blow up a plane, don't send another submarine to South Korea—don't do any of that stupid stuff.'" Instead, he suggested, the North Koreans should show the Americans exactly what they had. And, in his telling, they listened. "I said, 'You have them, right? Maybe you should test one. Maybe they have to see it.' Four or five months later, the Koreans did that nuclear test. I called the Embassy that morning and said, 'Congratulations, you are in the nuclear club now, boys.' They were all happy and stuff. I said, 'Watch the ball start rolling now.' And it did."

Over the years, Egan claims to have suggested some even more outlandish gambits. At some point in the mid-nineties, he says, he proposed that North Korea release American P.O.W.s to Iraq in exchange for oil; Iraq, which was at the time under the rule of Saddam Hussein, would then gain favor with the United States by releasing the Americans. In the interest of establishing a relationship with Iraq, Egan took the Iraqi Ambassador Nizar Hamdoun and his wife to a Giants game. A photograph on the wall of Cubby's shows the couple in the back seat of a limo, next to a grinning Egan. The prisoner-release plan never came to anything, but Egan, in his office at Cubby's, keeps a letter written in Arabic on official-looking stationery. "This is a letter from Saddam Hussein to me, thanking me for my help and my ideas," Egan, who never had the letter translated, told me. In fact, the letter is from a lesser official, thanking Egan for his hospitality at the Giants game. Egan also claims that he once proposed a plan whereby the Koreans would sell their nuclear weapons to the U.S., achieving denuclearization and economic recovery in the same stroke. The Americans, he says, rejected the idea. (Last year, an article in *Newsweek* described such a proposal, citing Egan.)

Although the name Bobby Egan is largely unfamiliar to those in higher diplomatic circles—Christopher Hill, through a spokesperson, said that he had "never heard of Mr. Egan"—there is one senior official who does have some knowledge of him: Charles L. (Jack) Pritchard, who was the director of Asian affairs for the National Security Council under Bill Clinton and, between 2001 and 2003, served as a special envoy for negotiations with North Korea. While Pritchard was in the Clinton Administration, he went to Cubby's to meet with Egan, but he has nothing good to say about him. "Ten years ago, I did go to his restaurant, based upon information that he said he had," Pritchard told me, adding that the information concerned the possibility of P.O.W.s being held in North Korea. "I checked it out, and I decided it probably was not as advertised." Pritchard dismissed Egan's claims of having influence in security matters: "He has made no contributions, no positive suggestions, as far as I can tell." He added that he stopped taking calls from Egan after he discovered that Egan was taping their conversations. "I disassociated myself with him, and I haven't missed him a single day," Pritchard said. Egan said that he made the tapes for his own protection. "Pritchard can kiss my big fat uneducated ass," he said. "The North Koreans are just knock-around guys who need a little insight into what we are really about. They need to know what the Bobby Egans are about, not the intellectuals in Washington."

Minister Kim, whom I called after observing the barbecue summit at Cubby's, confirmed that Egan has a relationship with North Korea. "He has been interested in improving the relations between the two countries in the past, and he would like to help with the provision of humanitarian assistance, like medicines, for the D.P.R.K.," Kim said. "He's a friend of the D.P.R.K., especially those people who receive the humanitarian assistance from those organizations." In a follow-up call, however, Minister Kim said that Egan had never proposed an oil-for-prisoners deal with Iraq or a nukes-for-cash deal with the U.S. He also said that the idea for North Korea's recent nuclear test did not originate in Hackensack.

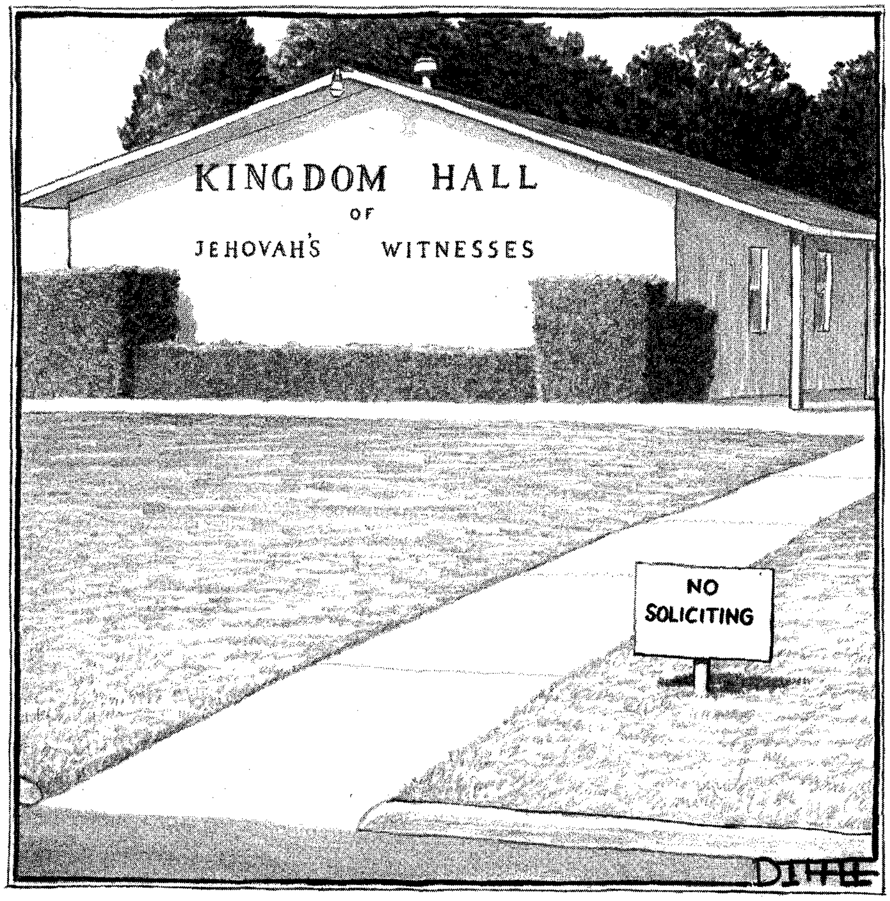
When I passed Kim's comments on to Egan, he seemed momentarily deflated, then resigned. "That's going to be their line, and that's O.K.," he said. "That's their right to say what they want, and I can understand their position. Maybe it's because, right now, the Koreans are in a position to move forward with our government. It is difficult, I guess, for a country to admit to something like this. They can discount it if they like, but I know different."

It has been a few years since Egan was last in North Korea, he says, and he is eager to go back. "Why do I do this?" he asked me one day. "Why did Mozart compose music? This is what I do best, and it's what I enjoy. I mean, I run a great restaurant, but this is what I do. And I have an overwhelming desire to get involved." He also has personal reasons for wanting to get back into action: he has been going through a tough time emotionally since separating from Lilia Mani, he says, and he wants something to take his mind off things. He also misses Han. "The only characteristic I have that the Koreans don't have is that I get emotionally attached to people," he said. "I can take aim, I can break a bone, a nose, a jaw. I can take burning. I can take getting cut. Drop me on my head. I can take any of it. But emotional pain is something that would disqualify me from being a North Korean commander. It is something that is very, very difficult for me. I have a difficult time saying goodbye to people I really care about."

There's a lot about North Korean society that Egan admires, he said that afternoon as he drove me into Manhattan. (He pays the toll on the George Washington Bridge in cash rather than using an E-Z Pass; he says he doesn't want anyone to know how many trips he has made back and forth, should the American authorities ever decide that he is too much of a liability and try to build a case against him for conspiring with the enemy.) "This is what I like—the North Koreans are very disciplined, and I like discipline," he said. "I think that is what is lacking in this country. They are a very hardworking people, and they are very family-oriented. And they have a better take on a man's role and a woman's role than we do. I think a lot of women in this country are trying to be men, and I think that could be the downfall of the family structure of this society. But, in North Korea, the man goes to work and the woman raises the family. Now, I wouldn't want that for my own daughters—I want them to be career girls, not dependent on any man but me—but in my own life I like the fact that a guy's a guy and a girl's a girl. You feel like a man when you are in North Korea. And, security-wise, it is a safer nation to live in. You are not going to have anybody break into your house, unless it comes from the top. And if it comes from the top you're in trouble."

In any case, Egan says, he prefers the American way of life, even if his way of life has been unlike that of any other American. "Certainly, I like where I am, or else I'd move there," he told me as we drove along the turnpike, past warehouses and swamplands of bulrushes, his radar detector chirping like a demented sparrow. "I'd be somebody in North Korea. Maybe I'd be in a little position of power. I wouldn't take all the power in the world—not to say that I would have much—but I would have more than I have here.

"But I wouldn't give this up," Egan went on. "I like it where I am. I am an American. I love my country. That is why I am doing all this. There are certain freedoms that I want, and choices I want to be able to make, that I wouldn't be able to make there." ♦



THE SHADOW ACT

Kara Walker's vision.

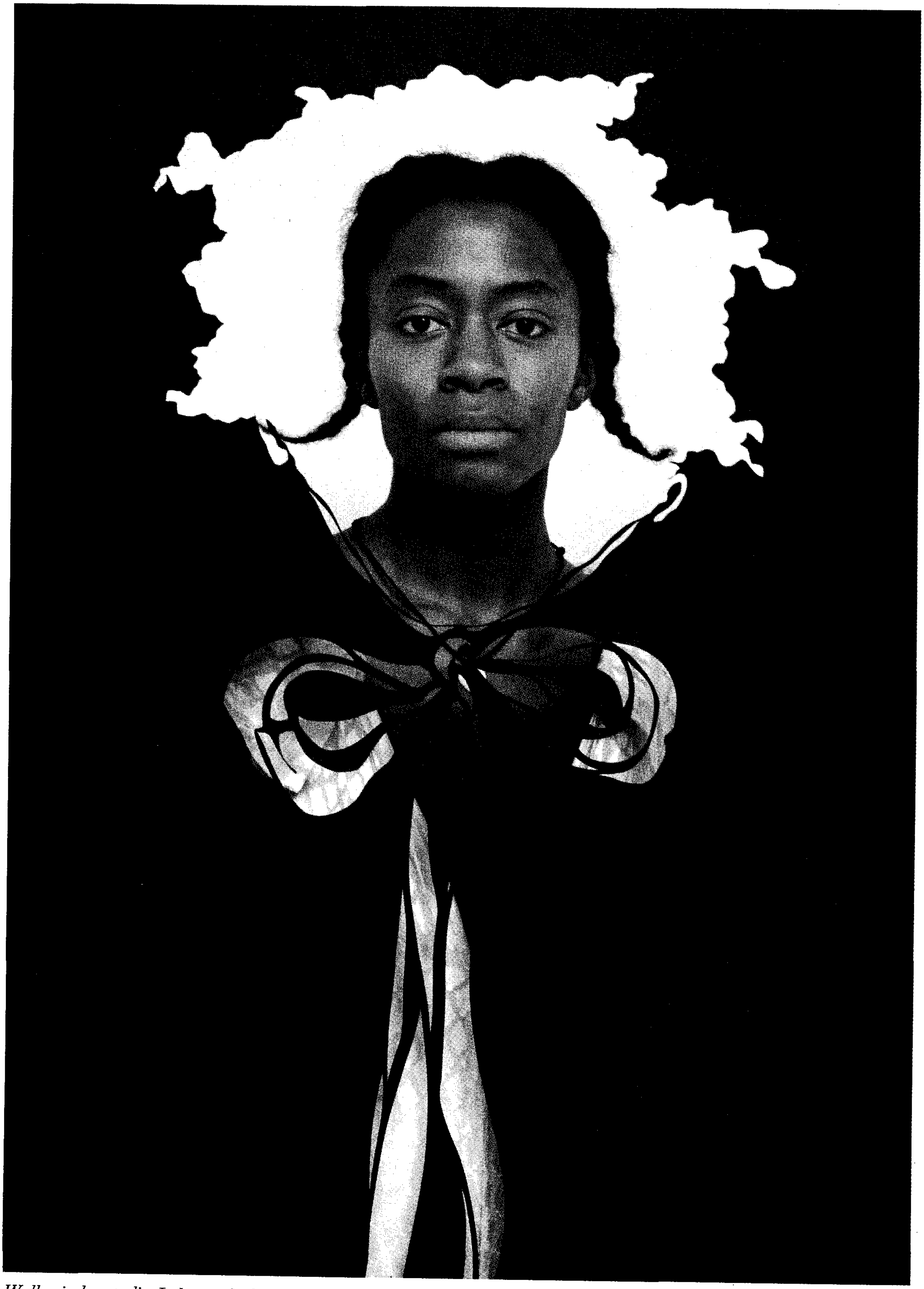
BY HILTON ALS

Octavia picked up her pen in the dimly lit Moroccan restaurant and leaned over her notebook. A bespectacled nine-year-old who aspires to a career in fashion, she thought for a moment and then set to work. It was June, 2007. Outside, Paris was thick with humidity in the twilight. Inside, the restaurant's pillows and rugs were redolent of tagines past. But Octavia's concentration was complete as she drew first a head, then a neck, then a pair of wide, staring eyes. Gradually, it became clear that the figure she was sketching was her mother, the thirty-seven-year-old black American artist Kara Walker, who was in Paris for the opening of her travelling retrospective, "My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love." The show, which had originated at Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis, in February, was due to open two days later at the ARC/Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. (Curated by Philippe Vergne, Walker Art Center's deputy director and chief curator, "My Complement" will open at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York, this month.) Intellectually and emotionally ambitious, Walker's retrospective showcases more than two hundred of the provocative—frequently incendiary—and racially charged images that she has produced in her thirteen-year career.

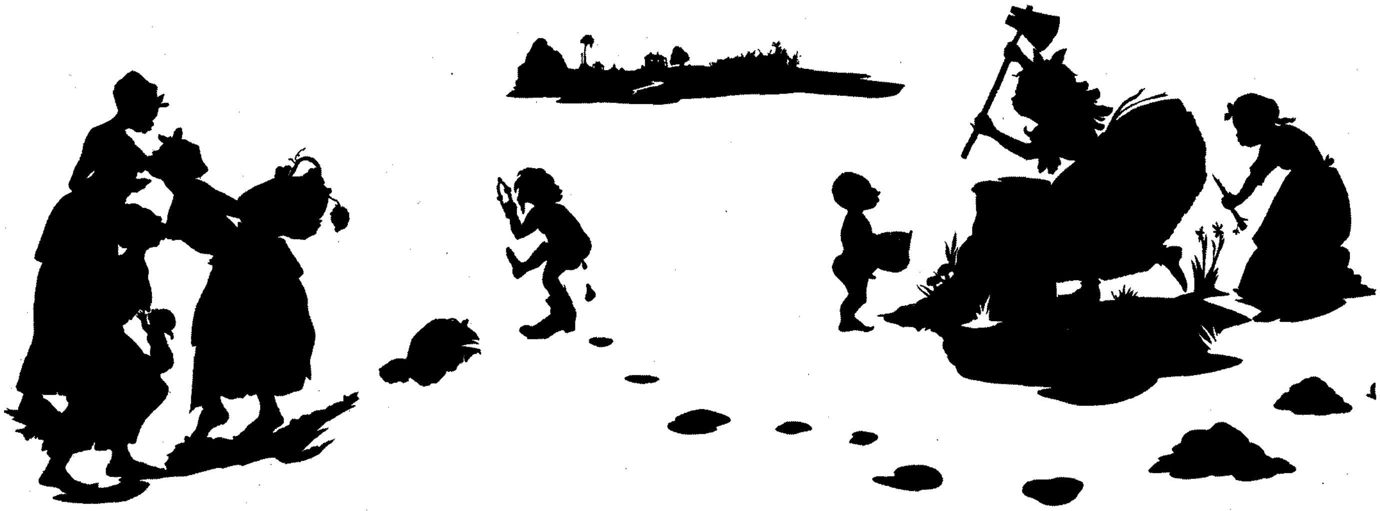
A kind of latter-day Daumier, Walker presents—in huge tableaux constructed from black-paper cutouts or silhouettes, as well as in watercolors, drawings, and films—a visual world that rivals the French master's. Instead of industrial Paris, Walker combs the mansions and swamps of the antebellum South to find her characters, whose surroundings are a visual corollary of their fetid imaginations and musty souls. Like Daumier, she pays attention to costume, which functions in her work as a signifier not only of race and class but of ethics. Her white characters are often creatures of fashion, morally bankrupt beneath their silken folds, while her black characters wear the uniform of the oppressed: head rags, aprons, or tattered britches. But Walker is much more than a caricaturist. Her work has a spiritual quality, a meditative thoroughness that recalls the canvases of the late Haitian master Hector Hyppolite. Where Hyppolite used Catholic and voodoo symbols, Walker's saint figure is a character she calls the Negress. Small, with braided hair and sometimes oversized boots, the Negress appears in a number of Walker's works, often shitting, vomiting, or farting her way through a beautiful composition on the subject of bestiality, lynching, or the Christian ethos of slavery. Still, Walker's belief in the Negress's trickster nature—in her wiles and her will to survive—makes *us* believe that the girl can beat the odds and make it through.

At the restaurant, Walker sat on her daughter's left. On Octavia's right were two other Walker women: Kara's sister, Dana, who runs the continuing-studies division of a design college, in Pasadena, California, and her mother, Gwendolyn, who is a former amateur dress designer and seamstress. (As a girl, Kara modelled Gwendolyn's designs in her home town, Stockton, California.) In a sense, visual culture is the family business. (Walker's father, Larry, is a painter.) But Walker—who as a child dreamed of becoming the next Charles Schulz—is, so far, the only family member to have achieved international visibility in the art world. In 1997, at the age of twenty-eight, she became one of the youngest people to be given a MacArthur "genius" fellowship. The award followed an outpouring of works like "The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven" (1995). In this large-scale cutout wall piece, Walker laid out, among other things, a trio of female slaves suckling one another while a plantation floats in the distance; a prepubescent slave girl—Walker's Negress—defecating and brandishing a tambourine; a white girl in a hoopskirt wielding an axe; and a pot-bellied gentleman with a wooden leg and an erect penis, which is shaped not like a male member but like a slave boy (in his hand is a sword impaling a slave baby). Walker's vision, here and elsewhere, is of history as trompe-l'oeil. Things are not what they seem, because America is, literally, incredible, fantastic—a freak show that is almost impossible to watch, let alone to understand. In Walker's work, slavery is a nightmare from which no American has yet awakened: bondage, ownership, the selling of bodies for power and cash have made twisted figures of blacks and whites alike, leaving us all scarred, hateful, hated, and diminished. "The End of Uncle Tom" not only takes on Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 masterwork—which James Baldwin called "a catalogue of violence"—but also explores the psychological legacy of the acts of brutality it described. Both historical and contemporary, the piece is a critique of slavery, as well as of the casual racism that modern blacks are exposed to on a daily basis in our post-politically correct times. Walker throws hatred back in our faces.

She uses the country's pre- and post-Reconstruction past to examine her personal history, too. "I am driven by myself . . . the capture of myself in the mirror, the auctioning off of myself . . . teeth and hair, tits and ass," she once wrote. And she is not unaware of the ambivalence—or anger—that the graphic and accusatory nature of her work inspires in some viewers. "Dear you insufferable cunt, you with your Black wailings, your Hungry ghosts, your vengeful heart," she wrote in the voice of an imaginary critic, on one of a series of index cards in a piece titled "Texts" (2001). "Why do you insist on tormenting yourself, as well as your loved ones, with Ingratitude? . . . You are given 'chances' 'opportunities' 'inches,' as well as Miles. And you take them all. And spit,



Walker in her studio. In her work, slavery is a nightmare from which no American has awakened. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.



spit in those faces, bite those hands defecate on heads from your bare branch perch."

In 2000, Walker gave a talk at the Des Moines Art Center. Afterward, a white man in the audience asked her how long she intended to make the type of work she did. Walker responded, "Oh, probably as long as I'm black and a woman." (This exchange has been quoted as an example of Walker's "fearlessness," with Walker depicted in the press as the art community's very own Sojourner Truth, a paragon of black righteousness in a corrupt white world—an image that Walker, who has said that she occasionally feels like "somebody's pet project," is very much aware of.) But, of course, the subtext behind the Des Moines man's question remains: Why—or how—does a Kara Walker come to exist at all?

The four Walker women covered the spectrum of the color brown. Octavia was the lightest (her father—the German-born jewelry designer Klaus Bürgel, from whom Walker recently separated—is white), Walker the darkest. The adult Walkers were tall and thin, with a graceful bearing and prominent clavicles. Their speaking voices were almost indistinguishable. Before answering any question, no matter how trivial—Moroccan waiter: "The couscous is *super!* You try, yes?"—they murmured among themselves like doves.

The men of the family were absent. Walker's father had stayed home, in Lithonia, Georgia. Her brother, Larry, Jr., a tax consultant who lives in a suburb of Atlanta, was not on speaking terms with Dana at the time. The Paris trip was important to Walker for reasons beyond the exhibition. "Because my family is so disparate and weird in some ways, it wasn't until recently that I had the feeling of having a family," she'd told me in late May, at her apartment on New York's Upper West Side. Two years earlier, when Dana was ill, Walker and her mother had travelled to California to help her as she recovered. "And for about ten days we were all in her little apartment with her three cats, just helping one another out, and I was so taken by the whole thing," Walker said. She hoped to duplicate the experience in Paris. "It's still kind of an experiment," she said thoughtfully.

At the end of the meal, Walker's mother raised her eyes from Octavia's drawing and said, "You know, as a child Kara drew first from paintings and photographs. When I told her it was good, she'd say, 'Mom, anyone can do that.' And I said, 'No, they can't.' " She turned to her daughter. "After a while, you were drawing what was there, what was around."

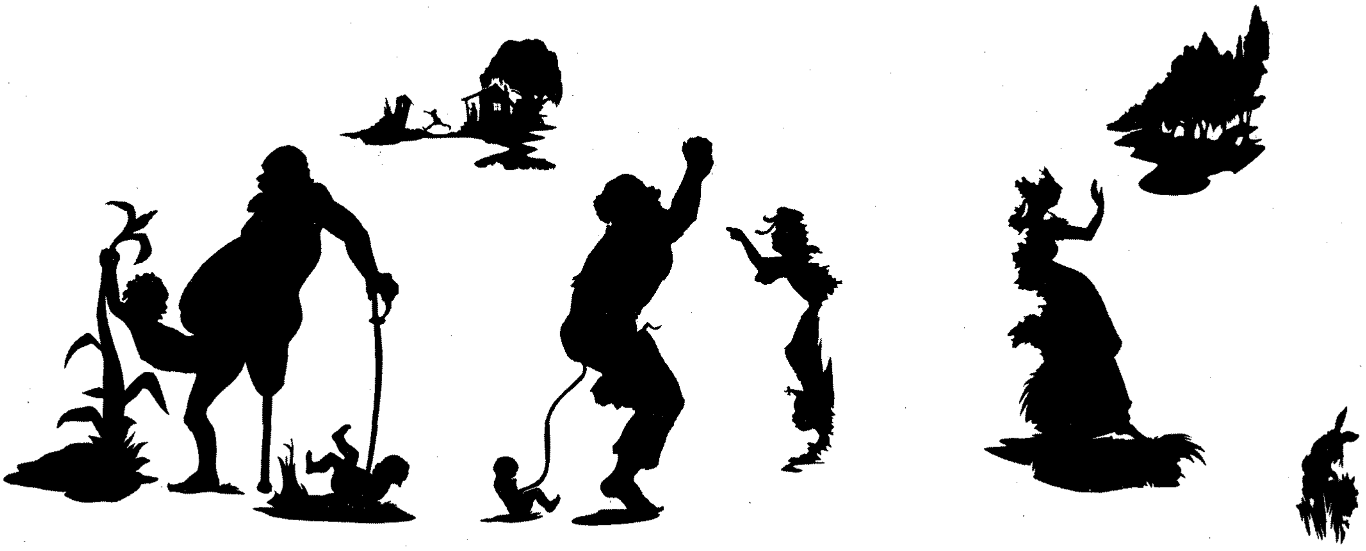
"No, I wasn't," Walker insisted. "I was drawing what I *saw*."

"The artist is like an abuser of everything—picture-playing, history, other people," Walker told me. Her vision of her work as an antidote to politeness has its roots in a number of events. In 1983, when Walker was thirteen, her father moved the family from Stockton, where he had chaired the art department at the University of the Pacific, to Atlanta, where he took on similar responsibilities at Georgia State University. Larry, whom Walker describes as having a "big personality," like Bill Clinton's, had grown up partly in Georgia, and every time he came back to California from an interview there he'd say, "It's a changed place. The New South."

The family eventually settled in Stone Mountain, a suburb of Atlanta, which was known for a giant carving commemorating Confederate Army leaders and was a historical meeting place for the Ku Klux Klan. "There was some kind of welcoming reception for my dad," Walker said. "The chairman of the Fine Arts Department had this kind of patrician accent, and he made these boring pinstriped paintings. And there was my dad, all six foot four of him, Mr. Can-Do, much respected in California, and Mr. Patrician talking down to him in a way that I couldn't conceive of: 'Very good, young man.' My dad stood there with this sort of nervous posture." Walker bowed her head and hunched her shoulders, striking an attitude of little-boy defeat. "I've never asked him about that moment. It was sad, because we had just left a place where there was a celebration for my dad's contributions—to the university and the city and the schools. And then, at this place, there were these people just looking at him, like, Hmm."

For many black American children, the primal scene is not the sight of their parents having sex but the sight of their parents being diminished by white condescension. The question that the child

Walker's "The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven" (1995).



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asks himself, then, is this: If whites can reduce my father—my protector—to powerlessness, what can they do to me? Walker claims to have absorbed her father's generally optimistic perspective—"It's all possible, and good things will come if you work toward them"—as well as her mother's subtle undercutting of it: "The things I remember my mom sort of intuiting under the radar were, like, Well, life ain't fair. So as a child I opted for my father's world view, with a kind of freaked-out understanding of there being something darker at work."

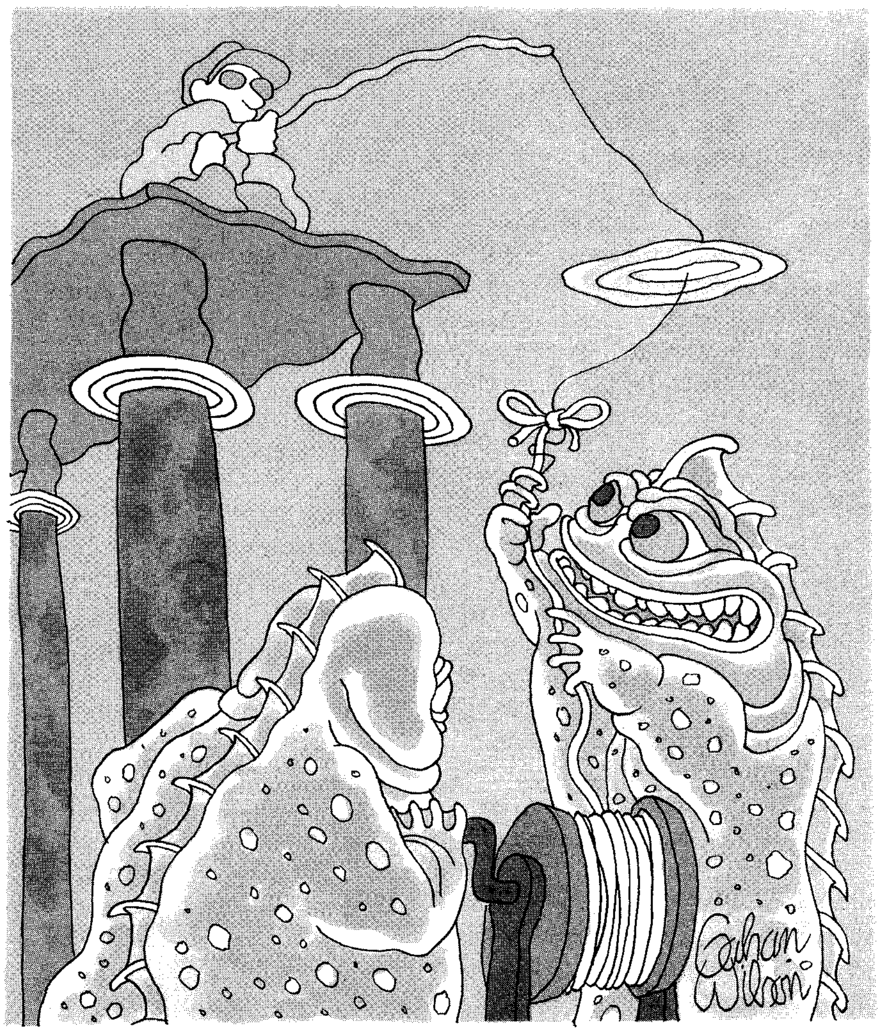
When it comes to Walker's art, the black male figure—generally a slave, sometimes engaged in homosexual acts with a white slave owner—has special meaning for her. She told me that, in order to bring emotional validity to her black male figures, "I've consulted 'official' black men. I look to my father and my brother. And they're sort of opposites in interesting ways." Larry, Jr., was, she said, "a problem kid until recently. He's got sort of a violent personality. Also very smart. So he's a searingly brilliant person who takes all these super-interesting wrong turns. When I was a kid, I thought of my brother as the guy who was always disappearing. He was a little bit aimless. But he became very religious—that was his thing. Right-wing. Jimmy Swaggart. The TV was at full blast all day long. He would go off on tangents, and I was his disciple, because I was home and I didn't have a driver's license, and I'd think, That's my role. That's what I do. If I can't beat him, I just have to sit here and wait until this is over."

Walker found refuge in art. She believes that Larry, Jr.,'s powerful reactions to things—"Sometimes my brother would go off like fireworks"—are "part of my makeup now. I have a big fear of losing control, or losing control in ways that I can't control. A studio, or just a sketchbook, has always been the place where I could do that, but it was confined and finite." Art was also a way of connecting with her father, who, despite his reserve, celebrated her childhood ambitions by using her drawings as Christmas cards. (His restraint has held strong. Walker mentioned a show of her drawings that her parents had come to see: "My dad talked about all kinds of superficial things, like the push and pull in the use of graphite and the eraser. And I kind of sat there next to him, wanting to say, 'We're looking at a disintegrating Negro pussy!' ")

As an adolescent, Walker sat in on her father's life-drawing classes. "Sometimes I would venture into his studio, which was the garage, bug him and hang around, wait for something," she said. What she was waiting for was her own voice, her particular vision. In 1987, she was accepted at the Atlanta College of Art. While there, she began to question not only her family's precepts but her identity as a painter. "There were definitely accepted artistic modes in the South in the eighties," she recalled. At the A.C.A., the work that was encouraged, she said, involved "this kind of crafty, gothic Southern sensibility." Conceptual art was not encouraged; "the mere use of the word 'conceptual' implied a violence to that universe," she said. Still, when Walker was nineteen, an instructor referred her to the work of the conceptual artist Adrian Piper. Since the nineteen-sixties, Piper, a light-skinned black woman who is sometimes mistaken for white, had been making photographs, word pieces, and sculptures that addressed race and gender and the ways in which we internalize the roles assigned to us. In response to the work, Walker wrote a paper that she titled "Black/White (grey) notes on Adrian Piper." The piece is a series of lyrical statements and questions that Walker asked herself: "I'm not an Other in some eyes / I think / and yet a black woman-artist-philosopher has a / calling card to announce when she has been stumbled upon / injured, ignored by the elite / over whom she strives to soar." Walker was not only announcing her ambitions; as she makes clear in the next line—"Am I ignorant of all strife?"—she was pushing herself toward identity politics, and beginning to question her own existence between two worlds, as a relatively privileged black woman. Walker now says of the paper, "I think it reveals something of my inhibitions at the time about making any kind of racialized gesture in my work." Back then, she said, her attitude toward race and art was "I'm not going to ghettoize. You have 'real' art, and then the art of the ethnic minority." But, as she examined the work of other contemporary black female conceptual artists, such as Lorna Simpson, things began to change. Life—and race—intruded on her "universalist" approach to her work. One pivotal episode for Walker was an event at the A.C.A. in which the school's relatively small contingent of black students arranged a study group to talk about race. "I was working in the slide library," Walker said, "and a black artist was invited to give a talk. All the black students went to this thing, and I was working in the library where it was happening, but I didn't attend. I was outside the door, doing the slides." Her habit of keeping herself, literally, apart from blackness was, she said, "the kind of thing I felt I needed to address." She was also doing work—a series of allegorical paintings involving birdlike creatures—that didn't please her. "It was just painting in general," she said. "It was just moving my hand, but to what purpose, you know?"

During her senior year, she added, "I started to recognize what sort of role I played, what place I occupied in the world of white students. I remember these students talking about 'In Living Color' "—the sketch-comedy television series with a primarily black cast. "It was sort of the heyday. And they were talking about the 'fly girls' on 'In Living Color,' and an older female student said, 'They have such big bottoms!' And another guy was trying to clarify, saying, 'I think that's something that black people are known for.' And I was sitting there alone, just sort of listening." The discomfort that Walker felt on overhearing the exchange fuelled her work as an artist. "At the time, I was mainly interested in sex and falling in love," she said. "And I had these romance magazines—*Bronze Thrills* was one of them, and *Jive*, I think. I was interested in the ads for clairvoyance and the romance photoplays in the back, and the advertisements for body enhancements. It was a devious little moment." At the A.C.A., she was given a wall on which to do a mural. "I wound up doing a mural of a booty implant. It was shortly after that conversation about butts."

Walker didn't fall in love during this period—she says now that there "wasn't really a real relationship before my husband"—but she had what she calls "experiments." "What I was getting out of the experiment is unclear," she said, "but something was received. And one of those things had to do with becoming a black woman—being objectified, being an object of white male desire. Without hitting a couple of dark milestones in my sense of self, I wouldn't have started making the silhouettes." One such dark milestone was Walker's on-again, off-again sexual relationship with a complicated white man. "I have for years been overcoming the vast mythology I constructed around him . . . certain that to acknowledge him publicly would mean my imminent death," she told me in an e-mail. "As I think I have alternately suggested he is a sadist, a racist, a misogynist . . . and, perhaps less credibly: Satan himself. At the time of my entanglement with him I suffered something my therapist later called a 'schizoid reaction' . . . where I became two very different people, kind of Jekyll and Hyde-ish, and behaved a bit like a trapped animal. It is true, I learned a lot during that time, but all of it couched in silence and a deep sense of terror. . . . I was to him 'an enigma' and there was no love lost."



"O.K., he's hooked—now reel him in."

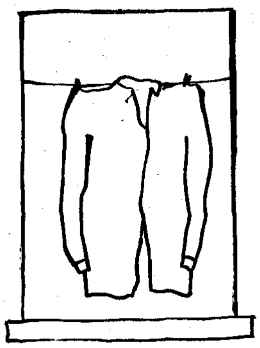
Walker's self-scrutiny on this and other issues forced me, as it has other viewers of her work, to see my questioning in a different light. By treating her as a journalistic "subject" and pressing her for self-revelation, had I also inadvertently turned her into an object? Just as she does in her art, she exposed herself—left herself vulnerable—in order to set me right. Thelma Golden, the director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, who has worked with Walker on a number of occasions, told me that she admires the artist's compulsion to reveal herself. Still, she worries for her. "Sometimes, when we're having a dialogue that's meant for publication, I say to Kara, 'Do you *really* want to say that?,' and the answer is always yes."

When Walker enrolled in the M.F.A. program at the Rhode Island School of Design, in Providence, in 1992 (she received a degree in painting and printmaking, in 1994), she found herself "far from bad influences." In Providence, Walker said, she felt, for the first time, that "I could make it my mission to discover why did I see this put-upon, burdened black girl when I looked at myself? Why did a girl like me, who grew up in the suburbs, safe and declawed, have this feeling?" She added, "Maybe early on, if I'd had sort of a critical input from black women in my life or a less silent black family, I wouldn't have been so curious." History was merging with the personal, and the dialogue that Walker was having with herself was supplemented by reading. "I kept getting books that had 'sex' in the title," she recalled. " 'Making Sex' was one—looking at how gender is described in nineteenth-century texts. Things like that." But there was one book that was especially significant, "Home Girls," an anthology of black feminist writing from the eighties. "It was kind of dated, but it was really useful," she said. "The book was so new for me, in a way." Hearing black feminist concerns articulated by other women and artists of color helped Walker to recognize how she was viewed in the eyes of her fellow-countrymen.

"One of the most interesting reversals of cultural prejudice . . . comes from the old notion that black women represented the lowest possible moral standard for any (white supremacist patriarchal) nation or state," Walker said, in an interview with Silke Boerma, before her 2002 show, "Kara Walker: For the Benefit of All the Races of Mankind An Exhibition of Artifacts, Remnants, and Effluvia EXCAVATED from the Black Heart of a Negress." She went on:

> Why? And what does that mean, or how has that viewpoint changed (or has it) in view of powerhouses like Oprah Winfrey or the hundreds of black entertainers and black female politicians and activists? Well, the myth comes about sometime in pre-Enlightenment Europe when whites confused Negroes with animals and then surmised that black women were fucking orangutans. I mean being fucked by them. Voltaire lampoons this myth in "Candide," William Blake made a print of helpless "primitive" girls being ravaged by apes. . . .
>
> So one of the motifs in my work is that as a Black Girl I am a thing which is violated by filthy beasts. The other is that Western progress and colonization, slavery, Modernism, etc., grew out of a white European need to not feel like the filthy beasts they feared they might be. . . .
>
> The other motif is that as a black woman seeking a position of power I must first dispel with (or at least reckon with) the assumption (not my own, but given to me like an inheritance) that I am amoral, beastly, wild. And that because of this I must be chained, domesticated, kept, traded, bred. And out of this subservient condition . . . I must escape, go wild, be free, after which I have to confront the questions: How free? How wild? How much further must I go to escape all I've internalized?

Not long before arriving in Providence, Walker told me, "I just sort of burst. And that's when I realized that everything I was doing, painting-wise, was just a lie and a cover. There was something in me that was never going to be relevant unless I sort of pulled back my skin and the skin of the painting that I was doing and looked at it for what it was." Walker's silhouette technique was the result of an intense period of looking. While she was immersing herself in the writings of black feminist critics and novelists, such as bell hooks, Michele Wallace, Toni Morrison, and Octavia Butler, she was also poring over reference books on early American art. One image captured her imagination: a nineteenth-century silhouette of a little black girl in profile. "I had a catharsis looking at early American varieties of silhouette cuttings," she wrote to me. "What I recognized, besides narrative and historicity and racism, was this very physical displacement: the paradox of removing a form from a blank surface that in turn creates a black hole. I was struck by the irony of so many of my concerns being addressed: blank/black, hole/whole, shadow/substance, etc. (There's also that great quote from Sojourner Truth: 'I sell the shadow to support the substance.')" Making silhouettes, Walker wrote to Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw for her book "Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker," in 2004, "kind of saved me. Simplified the frenzy I was working myself into. Created the outward appearance of calm."



In using the silhouette, Walker was appropriating a sentimental form to build a narrative about power. First drawing on black paper, and then cutting her figures out freehand, she was engaging in a "reversal of the cultural prejudice" that she had experienced as a student in Atlanta. Now she was creating an art history of her own, one that not only took on the image of blacks in Western art—much as the black American Robert Colescott had done in the nineteen-seventies, when he replaced the Dutch figures in van Gogh's "The Potato Eaters," for instance, with slaves and retitled the painting "Eat Dem Taters"—but went a step further, both through sheer technical skill and by shifting the axis of the work away from satire and toward the realm of social realism, as well as social comedy. Walker's realism centered on her interpretation of the Negress, a figure that other artists had tackled before her. The black assemblage artist Betye Saar had made a name for herself in the seventies with pieces, such as "The Liberation of Aunt Jemima" (a depiction of Aunt Jemima holding a shotgun), that sought to "empower" the stereotypes of black women. Ellen Gallagher had rendered the Negress abstract, in perhaps too pretty works devoted to the notion of beauty in black female hair culture. But Walker incorporated a violence and an honesty that were unprecedented. It was as if she had ripped the slave woman out of Manet's "Olympia" and pasted her to a wall, forcing her to stand on her own and answer for herself as the heroine—or villain—of the narrative, instead of simply offsetting Olympia's white beauty.

The first silhouettes that Walker exhibited in New York were part of the "Selections 1994" show at the Drawing Center, in SoHo. Walker had come to New York from Rhode Island to interview at the College Art Association—a yearly forum where art historians and artists check out the academic job market. Walker was still a student, and she was intent on a career as a teacher. She had brought some slides of her first silhouettes. "I know there was a group of images on paper, and one was a Little Eva figure," she recalled, "and one was kind of a pickaninny melon, bursting in half, and the other one was a girl figure, with exaggerated black features in her face, while the rest of her body was like a mass, a kind of explosion of black paper." An artist friend encouraged her to leave her slides at the Drawing Center, which was run by an enthusiastic young curator named Annie Philbin. (She now heads the Hammer Museum, in Los Angeles, where "My Complement" is scheduled to open in March.) Philbin's associate James Elaine insisted that she take a look at Walker's work. "It was astonishing," Philbin recalled. She contacted Walker and asked if she could render her images in a larger scale and make a wall drawing.

The resulting piece, the thirteen-by-fifty-foot "Gone, An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart," was the most blatantly romantic of Walker's early works. On the far left, two white lovers in the antebellum South stand on the banks of a river beneath a tree heavy with moss and lean into each other for a kiss. The gentleman's sword points to the backside of a small male slave, who holds a strangled bird, which may have just emerged from between the legs of the female slave sitting before him. In the center of the wall is a Plymouth Rock-like shape, from which a white man being fellated by a slave girl looks to the sky and sees a slave boy floating away, his phallus swollen into an enormous, almost human shape. (The viewer is reminded of the lovers, ghosts, and fabulist foliage in Toni Morrison's 1981 romance, "Tar Baby.") Clearly, Walker was still working somewhere between "pure" beauty—the elevation of shapes—and the search for a narrative that could capture both the eye and the heart. "There was this huge gesture that came out of me," she said. "And I felt like I got it back in waves." In a review of the resulting work that ran in the *Times*, the art critic Holland Carter wrote, "In a large figurative tableau . . . she fashions a surreal, raunchy, angry fantasia on the world of antebellum slavery. Looking like a cross between a children's book and a sexually explicit cartoon, this is skillful, imaginative work and will doubtless be showing up elsewhere soon."

"It was my proudest moment," Walker told me. "Honestly and truly. There's a little grainy picture of me, and I think that face is a proud face." But after the show, she says now, "I went, O.K., I don't know what happens after this. I didn't have a very good game plan." What Walker did have was a number of dealers who were eager to represent her. In the end, she signed on with Brent Sikkema, who is known for his political commitment to artists of color and women, and who has been her sole dealer ever since. "I think, maybe, one of the reasons Kara came to the gallery is that I went to Providence," Sikkema told me. "I had phoned Annie, who took care of the artists she showed at the Drawing Center. I thought, I love this, but there's no way I can go up against the other dealers who have money. I was struggling; my gallery was in my apartment." But one day, not long after the show opened, Sikkema found himself driving through Rhode Island with a friend. "I said, 'You know, I think Kara Walker lives around here.' And my friend said, 'Why don't you call her?' So I jumped out of the car and went to a phone booth. She was listed, and she asked us over and started showing us her work. It was like being in someone's laboratory. She was like a scientist who had been working away on all these gorgeous, strange, unforgettable experiments."

After Walker joined Sikkema, in 1994, the gallery blossomed. (It is now housed in a large, pristine space in Chelsea.) "I call the gallery the house that Kara built," Sikkema says. Walker's career and her personal life flourished, too. In 1993, she met Klaus Bürgel, who was then an instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design. They were married in Atlanta in 1996. Between 1994 and 1997, when she was awarded the MacArthur, Walker had eight solo exhibitions, and took part in more than fifteen group shows. The fellowship, however, resulted in an attack waged by what one observer called the "thought police": a group of artists who believed that visual art should be used to ennoble black Americans, not to expose their family secrets. In the summer of 1997, Betye Saar sent more than two hundred letters to prominent artists, writers, and politicians asking them to join her in a campaign to prevent Walker's art from being exhibited. "I am writing you, seeking your help to spread awareness about the negative images produced by the young African-American artist, Kara Walker," she wrote. "Are African-Americans being betrayed under the guise of art?" her accompanying statement began. Saar objected not only to the content of Walker's work—which she termed "revolting"—but to its lack of a relevant social consciousness, at least as she understood it. Saar's own satirical pieces about stereotypes in advertising were safely ensconced in a folk

HANDYMEN

The furnace wheezes like a drenched lung.
You can't fix it.
The toilet babbles like a speed freak.
You can't fix it.
The fuse box is a nest of rattlers.
You can't fix it.
The screens yawn the bees through.
Your fingers are dumb against the hammer.
Your eyes can't tell plumb from plums.
The frost heaves against the doorjambs,
The ice turns the power lines to brittle candy.
No one told you about how things pop and fizzle,
No one schooled you in spare parts.
That's what the guy says but doesn't say
As he tosses his lingo at your apartment-dweller ears,
A bit bemused, a touch impatient,
After the spring melt has wrecked something, stopped something,
After the hard wind has lifted something away,
After the mystery has plugged the pipes,
That rattle coughs up something sinister.
An easy fix, but not for you.
It's different when you own it,
When it's yours, he says as the meter runs,
Then smiles like an adult.

—*Cornelius Eady*

tradition and presented with a certain knowingness and warmth—with a wink at the audience. In Saar's predictable world, "whitey" was mostly to blame. Walker, on the other hand, explored not only the white world's fetishization of control and dominance but the black community's complicity in its own emotional enslavement.

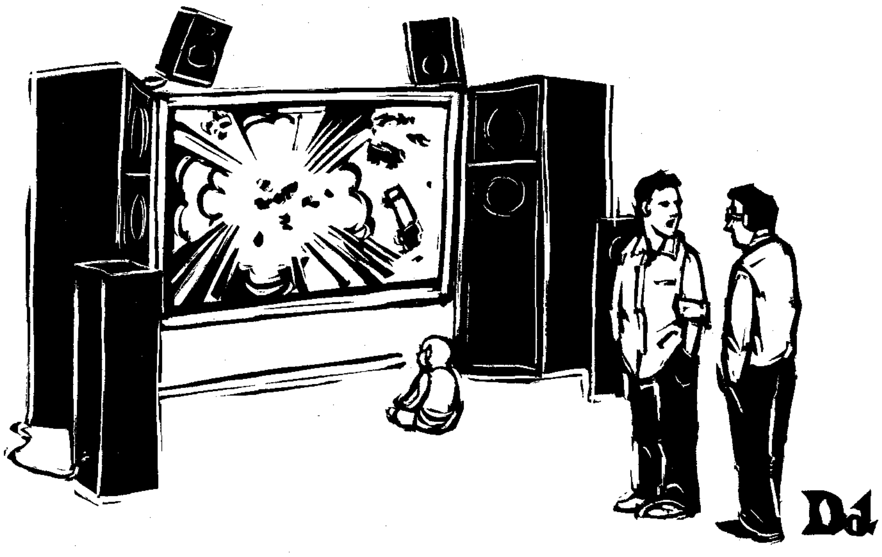
Shortly afterward, Juliette Harris, the editor of the *International Review of African American Art*, wrote a long piece on the response of black artists and intellectuals to Walker's work and to that of another black artist, Michael Ray Charles. "I have nothing against Kara except that I think she is young and foolish," Saar told Harris. "Here we are at the end of the millennium seeing work that is very sexist and derogatory. . . . The trend today is to be as nasty as you want to be: TV, Rodman, rap. The goal is to be rich and famous. There is no personal integrity. . . . Kara is selling us down the river." With a flourish, Saar announced, "Aunt Jemima is back with a vengeance." (Of the article, Walker noted, "It's beautiful, because, to dismiss what I do, it basically does what I do: creates a stereotype where once there was a person. Uses all of the accoutrements of that person's humanity—their skin, their hair, their social life—to construct another character. The only thing that's missing is the signature, saying, 'This is my piece. This is *my* Kara Walker.' ")

In October of the same year, the black American artist Howardena Pindell joined the fray when she said, in a talk at the Johannesburg Biennale, "What is troubling and complicates the matter is that Walker's words in published interviews mock African-Americans and Africans. . . . Walker consciously or unconsciously seems to be catering to the bestial fantasies about blacks created by white supremacy and racism." From Walker's perspective, she was exposing, not catering to, white male fantasies about black women. In 1998, in an interview with her cousin the writer James Hannaham, she addressed the prevalence of those attitudes today. "At some point in Atlanta," she recalled, "I was with my then boyfriend, John, in the park, thinking we were alone, but when we got back to the car there was a flyer from the Ku Klux Klan, spelling out for him all the evils of black women, describing what sort of peril he was in, and identifying stereotypes of disease and moral degradation. That was an awakening for naïve me. So I guess I needed a way to question how these types of issues have been represented in art previously."

In the *International Review* article, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., was one of several intellectuals and artists who came to Walker's defense. Walker, he argued, was "seeking to *liberate* both the tradition of the representation of the black in popular and high art forms and to liberate our people from residual, debilitating effects that the proliferation of those images undoubtedly has had upon the collective unconscious of the African-American people." He went on, "No one could mistake the images of Kara Walker . . . as *realistic* images! Only the visually illiterate could mistake their post-modern critiques for realistic portrayals, and that is the difference between the racist original and the post-modern, signifying, anti-racist parody that characterizes this genre of artistic expression."

When I asked Kathy Halbreich, the director of Walker Art Center, about the uproar, she said, "I'm amazed that Kara continued to make stronger and stronger work. I think a lesser psyche would have collapsed." To Halbreich, Saar's and Pindell's criticisms seemed "largely generational. I understand that these women came of age when ambiguity was poison, but their efforts to silence Kara made me sad, even as I sort of understood the context out of which their speech arose. Here were women who'd worked so hard to get a voice, and they were trying to paralyze a younger set of vocal cords." Walker, who was pregnant at the time of the attacks, told me that she had been "pretty upset." "It was a triple whammy—the accolades, the dismissals, the hormones, all at the same time," she said. "You know, I had just started, *kaboom*, fireworks going on, and I felt, Well, I have to redouble my efforts if I'm going to keep all this going, and I've got to take this child and go charging through, like in football."

In a sense, the argument over what is and is not racially "correct" in the art world originated in 1984, when Walker was still in high school and the late curators William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe mounted a show called " 'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art" at the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition, which sought to find the "affinities" between European modernists, such as Gauguin and Picasso, and "tribal" art from Africa and elsewhere, caused a sensation. After it opened, the writer Thomas McEvilley published an essay titled "Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief," in *Artforum*. The show, McEvilley argued, "illustrates, without consciously intending to, the parochial limitations of our world view and the almost autistic reflexivity of Western civilization's modes of relating to the culturally Other." Janet Malcolm, commenting on McEvilley's essay, in this magazine, in 1986, noted, "There was something about the piece that was instantly recognized as more deeply threatening to the



"We're done with Baby Einstein. We're on to Baby Bruckheimer."

status quo than it is usual for a critique of a museum show to be. . . . McEvilley's article was like the knocking on the door dreaded by Ibsen's master builder—the sound of the younger generation coming to crush the older one."

What McEvilley set out to crush was the vision of "tribal art" as a tool to be used by more sophisticated Western artists. He decried "the museum's decision to give us virtually no information about the tribal objects on display, to wrench them out of context, calling them to heel in the defense of formalist modernism," adding, "No attempt is made to recover an emic, or inside, sense of what primitive esthetics really were or are. . . . The point of view of Picasso and others . . . is the only focus of MOMA's interest. . . . By their absolute repression of primitive context, meaning, content, and intention . . . [Rubin and Varnedoe] have treated the primitives as less than human, less than cultural—as shadows of a culture, their selfhood, their Otherness, wrung out of them." In other words, the message McEvilley drew from the MOMA show was that people of color don't exist unless whites say they do—and, even then, they exist only as they are seen by whites. What person wouldn't rebel in the face of declarations of his nonexistence?

The " 'Primitivism' " show came at a time when the art world was redoubling its efforts to be inclusive, embracing first the feminist artist Sue Williams, then the performance artist Karen Finley, and the black artist Fred Wilson, among others. "Difference" had hit the mainstream, in both art and fashion. (The vogue for including artists of color and "queer" artists in major surveys reached its apotheosis in 1993, when Daniel Joseph Martinez created buttons for that year's Whitney Biennial that read, "I CAN'T IMAGINE EVER WANTING TO BE WHITE.") Nevertheless, more than twenty years later, Walker and others registered the same kind of blindness to the fate of black people that had incensed McEvilley, in the tardy response of the primarily white political élite to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, which destroyed the lives and livelihoods of thousands of poor black Americans. Earlier that year, Walker had been invited by Gary Tinterow, the head of modern art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to do some work in the museum's twentieth-century wing. (Walker had moved to New York in 2002, to teach at Columbia University.) As Tinterow put it to her, she could curate a show of her own works, or one that also utilized the museum's holdings by other artists. Walker chose the second option. Then Katrina happened. Hence not only the title of the show, "After the Deluge," but the themes expressed in the works chosen: black people, poverty, water, disaster. Writing in the *Times*, the art critic Roberta Smith said of the show, "If, like Goya, Ms. Walker is a pitiless satirist who skewers the human condition with a grace and precision tantamount to tenderness, you could almost say that Katrina is Ms. Walker's version of Goya's Napoleonic Wars. But not quite: 'After the Deluge' includes no post-Katrina work by Ms. Walker. Instead, it reminds us that poverty and even water have also been longtime themes for Ms. Walker; if anything, her work warned of the pathologies that Katrina unleashed." (For the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, in August, Walker created a cover for this magazine, showing the continued plight of the hurricane victims, titled "Post Katrina—Adrift.")

"Forget it, Josh—neither of us has the time-management skills for a sordid affair."

A day before the retrospective opened in Paris, I sat in front of the wall that separated the exhibition space from the lobby. On it, Vergne had installed Walker's "Endless Conundrum, an African Anonymous Adventuress" (2001). In the piece, which measures fifteen by thirty-five feet, were images on the subject of "modernism and primitivism." Witness the black American star Josephine Baker shaking loose her famous skirt made of artificial bananas, as another black woman, naked, crouches beneath her, expelling gas. Nearby, Walker had placed silhouettes of sculptures resembling works by Giacometti and Brancusi—what McEvilley would surely have seen as symbols of the European stealing from the African and then stamping out his source. Richard Flood, who is the chief curator of the New Museum of Contemporary Art, in New York, explained that Walker had originally created the piece for the Fondation Beyeler, a Swiss museum that exhibits African tribal sculptures next to modernist works: " 'Primitivism' " redux. Still, Vergne hoped that, by confronting the French audience with "Endless Conundrum" first, he could show them something of Walker's message. "She uses pretty forms for content that hurts," he told me.

As I strolled through the galleries, I watched Walker at work. She had pressed Octavia into service for the installation of "Slavery! Slavery!" (1997). "Put the clouds there," she told her softly. Octavia complied, and then stepped back to have a look. Walker said, "I don't know if it's right, but it looks right." Farther down the hall, Walker's three short films were play-

"Have we really reached a point in our relationship where a heavy police presence is required?"

ing in separate rooms. The film I kept returning to—which played in a loop in my head, as it did at the museum—was called "8 Possible Beginnings. Or: the Creation of African-America" (2005). It is, for me, her most sophisticated and haunting work in the medium. The film shows a series of shadow puppets—Walker cutouts. Projections of blacks on a slave ship are intercut with daguerreotypes from the period, showing the journey across the Middle Passage. A great black head rears up and swallows some black stick figures: the motherland. A black male slave has sex with a puny white slave owner, but only after fellating himself, to the sound of cheerful antebellum ditties. The black male slave gives birth to a child, one of various smiling Topsy-like angels who hover throughout the movie. In one of the final tableaux, slaves hang from a tree. A slave girl, pursued by a white man, makes her way through the landscape as Walker and her daughter intone, among other things, "I wish I were white" and "Maybe all of this will dream away and I will disappear." (When I asked Walker how she felt about including Octavia in her work, she said that she'd considered asking one of Octavia's classmates, but felt that it would be too strange. "I didn't want to exploit her or put her in that weird spot," she added. "I just asked her if she would do it. She was hanging around the studio a fair amount when I was working on the film, anyway. Then I had to find a proper way to pay her!")

"Eight Possible Beginnings" brought to mind the white South African artist William Kentridge's shadow-puppet films, which were inspired by his experience of apartheid. Like Kentridge's works, Walker's are laden with powerful, profound treasures, as well as with the junk that clogs up our collective sensibility when it comes to race. I also heard in the film the plea for understanding put forth by Charlotte Forten, a "free" black woman, in her Civil War diaries, as well as references to Kate Chopin's 1894 story collection "Bayou Folk" and to various blaxploitation movies from the nineteen-seventies. (Oscar Micheaux, the father of "race" films, was an influence on Walker. "I love his complex, Ed Wood style of directing," she told me.) As the scenes played over and over, I tried to divorce the images from issues of race, and found them even more arresting. What became clearer was Walker's less provocative but equally poignant theme: our desire to be dominated by someone else, whom we will always call Other.

• •

Tout Paris showed up for Walker's opening, or as *tout* as Paris could be in late June. Most people walked through the exhibition silently, respectful if slightly baffled. The response to the show was somewhat different from what it had been at Walker Art Center. There, for instance, Halbreich and Vergne received a three-and-a-half-page, single-spaced letter about the show from a black museum employee named Marcus Harcus, in which he wrote, in part, "Obviously Kara Walker is a world-class talent. . . . I feel her artwork is impressive & important, but also potentially dangerous & corrupting. K.W.'s artwork forces everyone who experiences it to confront the realities of the daily atrocities suffered by 'New World' Africans over the course of 400 years. This could be highly valuable. When people view the silhouettes on cycloramas or film, we feel like eyewitnesses to the scenes. This could be damaging." By which Harcus meant that it was Walker's responsibility both to illustrate history and to protect us from it. This is the kind of dialogue that Walker welcomes. (A few days after the opening in Paris, she told me that she was most engaged by a couple of black museum workers there who asked her how black Americans had responded to the pieces.)

Walker attended the Paris opening in a white dress with a black bow that resembled an artist's smock. She swayed to the music, while well-wishers stopped by to greet her. As Octavia played with a friend, her grandmother asked her to keep the noise down. "I always try to teach my children not to annoy people," she said. There were no speeches after the show. Instead, Vergne and Halbreich took the Walkers, Sikkema, and others to dinner at a restaurant across the street. There, Halbreich toasted Walker. Then Walker toasted Vergne and the installers. Octavia sat to her left, drawing. Walker, her eyes cast down toward her place setting, recalled a story that she wanted to share with the assembled. With a smile, she said, "When Octavia was four, we were at an event like this." Octavia groaned, and worked more assiduously on her sketch. Walker continued, "And people were saying my name. And Octavia looked up and said, exasperated, 'Kara Walker, Kara Walker. When is it gonna be *my* turn?' " ♦

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More art by Kara Walker.

FICTION

MARRIED LOVE

BY TESSA HADLEY

Lottie announced that she was getting married.

This was at the breakfast table at her parents' house one weekend. The kitchen in that house was upstairs, its windows overlooking the garden below. It was a tall, thin, old house, comfortably untidy, worn to fit the shape of the family. The summer morning was rainy, so all the lights were on, the atmosphere close and dreamy, perfumed with toast and coffee.

"Whatever for?" Lottie's mother, Hattie, said, and carried on reading her book. She was an English teacher, but she read crime novels at weekends: this one was about a detective in Venice.

Lottie was nineteen, but she looked more like thirteen or fourteen. She was just over five feet tall, with a tight little figure and a barrel chest; she insisted on wearing the same glasses with thick black frames that she had chosen years earlier, and her hair, the color of washed-out straw, was pulled into pigtails.

Everyone happened to be at home that weekend, even Lottie's older brother, Rufus, and her sister, Em, who had moved away.

"Have you got a boyfriend at last?" Em asked.

Lottie was always pale, with milky translucent skin behind an arc of ghost freckles across her snub nose, but she seemed to be even whiter than usual that morning, blue veins standing out at her temples; she clenched her hands on either side of the placemat in front of her. They were improbable hands for a violinist: pink and plump, with short blunt fingers and bitten cuticles.

"You're not taking me seriously!" she cried.

A squall of rain urged against the steamed-up windowpanes, the kettle boiled, toast sprang from the toaster for no one in particular. Vaguely, they all looked at her, thinking their own thoughts. Lottie emanated intensity; her personality was like a demon trapped inside a space too small. Even as a baby she had been preternaturally perceptive and judgmental. Her talent for the violin, when it was discovered, had seemed an explanation for her surplus strength, or a solution to it; she had begun on an instrument so tiny that it looked like a Christmas-tree decoration. Now she was living with her parents while she studied for her music degree at the university.

MARTA NASCIMENTO/REA-REDUX (2006)

"Why ever would you want to get married?" Hattie said reasonably. "Dad and I have never felt the need."

"I'm not like you," Lottie said.

This was one of her battle cries.

"Of course, you're not like anybody, sweetheart. You're just yourself."

"For a start, I happen to have religious beliefs. I believe that marriage is a holy sacrament."

"No, you don't," Rufus said. "You've never said anything about them before."

"So when, exactly, are you getting married?" Em asked skeptically. "And who to?"

"How could I possibly know yet when? That's exactly what I want to talk to you about. I want to sort out a date. I want you all to be there. I want it to be a proper wedding. With a dress and everything. And bridesmaids, probably."

"So you *have* got a boyfriend!" Em said.

Em was gracefully loose-jointed, with her mother's hooded, poetic eyes; she worked in the toxicology department of the city hospital.

"My husband, he's going to be."

Hattie put down her book and her coffee mug in concern. "Poppet, you're so young. There's no hurry about the marrying part. Of course, you can have a proper wedding one day if that's what you want, but there's no need to rush into anything."

Sullen white dents appeared in Lottie's cheeks where her jaw was set. "You forget that I have a whole life of my own now, as an adult, outside of this house, about which you know nothing, absolutely nothing. You don't warn Emily not to rush into anything."

"To be fair," Em said, "I'm not the one who just said I was getting married."

"Have we met him?" Hattie asked. "Is he on your course?"

"Is it the one with the stammer in your string quartet?" asked Noah, Lottie's younger brother, who was still at school. "Tristan?"

"How could you think I'd want to marry Tristan?"

"Personally, I'd warn against anyone in a string quartet," Rufus said.

"Shut up, Rufus. It isn't anything to do with Tristan."

"So what's his name, then?" Noah persisted.

Duncan, the children's father, arrived from his morning ritual with the *Guardian* in the bathroom upstairs. He was shorter than Hattie, stocky, densely and neatly made, with a wrinkled, ugly, interesting head; she was vague and languid, elegant, beginning to be faded. He taught special-needs kids at a local comprehensive, *though not the same one* where Hattie taught. "What is whose name?"

Alarm took flight in Hattie. "Lottie, darling, you're not pregnant, are you?"

"I just don't believe this family," Lottie wailed. "There's something horrible about the way your minds work."

"Because if you're pregnant we can deal with that. It doesn't mean that you have to get married."

"*Is* she pregnant?" Duncan asked.

"Of course I'm not."

"She says she's going to get married."

"Whatever for?"

"Also that she has religious beliefs, all of a sudden."

This seemed to bother Rufus more than the marrying. He was an ironic pragmatist; he worked as a research analyst for the Cabinet Office.

"The reason," Lottie said, "is that I've met someone quite different from anyone I've ever known before, different from any of you. He's a great man. He's touched my life, and transformed it. I'm lucky he even noticed I exist."

She had a gift of vehemence, the occasional lightning flash of vision so strong that it revealed to others, for a moment, the world as it was from her perspective.

"And who is he?" Em asked her, almost shyly.

"I'm not going to tell you now," Lottie said. "Not after this. Not yet."

"When you say 'great man,'" her father considered, "I get the feeling that you're not talking about one of your fellow-students."

Hattie saw what he meant, after gaping at him for half a second. "One of your teachers! Is it?"

Lottie, blinking behind her glasses, turned her round white face toward her mother, precarious, defiant.

"Does this teacher know that you feel this way about him?"

"You seriously think I'm making it all up? I told you, he loves me. He's going to marry me."

Duncan wondered if it wasn't Edgar Lennox. "He's some kind of High Anglican, isn't he? I believe he writes religious music.”

“And so?” Lottie challenged. “If it was him?”

“Oh, no!” Hattie stood up out of her chair, uncharacteristically guttural, almost growling. “That's out of the question. Edgar Lennox. That's just not thinkable, in any way, shape, or form.”

“I hate it when you use that phrase,” Lottie shouted, standing up, too. “*Way, shape, or form.* It's so idiotic. It's exactly the sort of thing you would say. It just goes to show your mediocrity.”

“Let's try to talk about this calmly,” Duncan said.

Edgar Lennox was old enough to be Lottie's grandfather. Forty years older than she was, Hattie shrieked; later, it turned out to be more like forty-five. His already being married, to his second wife, was only a minor difficulty compared with this. Duncan and Hattie had met him twice: once when they went to the university Open Day with Lottie, and once, before that, at a private viewing of paintings by one of Hattie's friends. He had seemed, at the time, Hattie's ideal of an elderly creative artist: tall, very thin, with a shock of upstanding white hair, a face whose hollows seemed to have been carved out by suffering, tanned skin as soft as leather, a charcoal-gray linen shirt.

“When you say he's touched your life, could we be quite specific about this?” Duncan said. “Has he actually, in the ordinary, non-transcendent sense of the word, touched you?”

Em protested in disgust. “Dad, you can't ask her that!”

Em had been crying; her eyelids were swollen and puffy, and her face was blotched. Hattie's and Lottie's eyes were hot and dry.

Hattie turned on him. “How can you put it like that? How could you make it into one of your clever remarks?”

“If you're asking,” Lottie said, “whether we've consummated our relationship, then, yes, of course we have. What do you think we are? We're lovers.”

“Naturally, I'm making a formal complaint to the university,” Hattie said. “He'll lose his job. There's no question about that.”

“That'll be sensible, won't it?” Em said. “Then if they are married he won't be able to support her.”

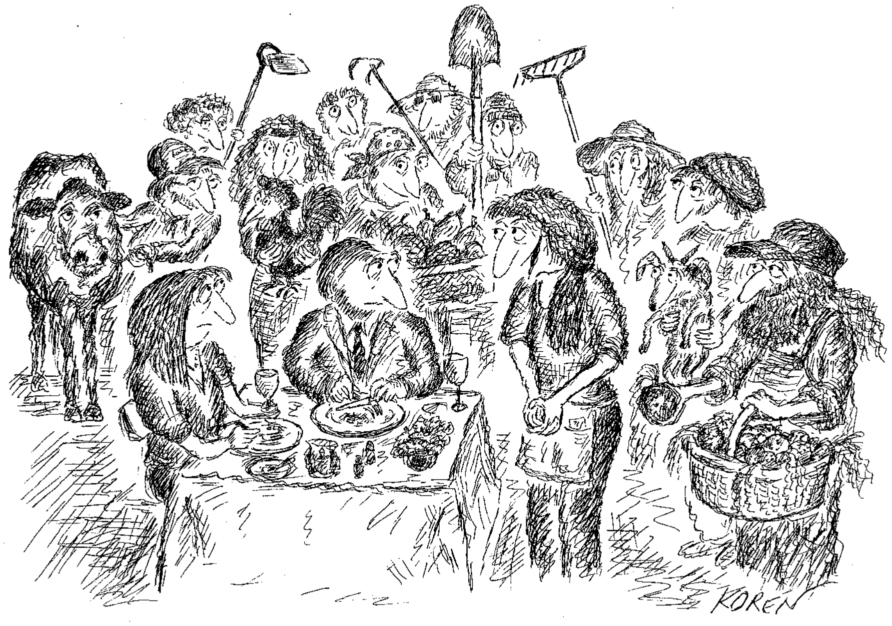
“You're sure she isn't making all this up?” Rufus suggested.

“Think what you like,” Lottie said. “You'll soon know.” She sat with her mouth primly shut, shining with a tragic light.

Beyond the kitchen windows, veils of gray rain drove sideways into the sodden skirts of the horse-chestnut tree, darkening the pink flowers.

Hattie said that the whole thing reminded her of when she was at art college, and a friend of hers had heard suddenly that her sister was on the point of entering a convent, a closed order that allowed no contact with family or friends.

“We all piled onto a train and went up to Leeds together on the spur of the moment, six or seven of us who were close then, and met this sister in a tea shop, and tried to convince her of everything in the world that was worth staying for.”



“We think it's terribly important that you meet the people responsible for the food you're eating tonight.”

“Don't be ridiculous, Mum. I'm not going into a convent.”

“Did it work?” Noah asked. “Did you convince her?”

Hattie frowned and pressed her knuckles to her forehead. “I can't remember whether she went into the convent or not in the end. Perhaps she did. I can only remember the tea shop, and after that a pub, and trying to think of all the things we couldn't bear to leave behind, and getting gradually drunker and drunker.”

“This isn't the same thing,” Duncan said firmly. “And we aren't at anything like that stage yet, anyway.”

Lottie stared at them in genuine bewilderment. “I don't understand you all,” she said. “How can you not want for me what I want?”

Noah saw his parents leave the house late in the evening. His bedroom was in the attic. He was sitting on the sill of his little casement window, his feet in the lead-lined gutter that ran like a trough the length of the Georgian terrace, looking down over the stone parapet into the street, four stories below. Though it was strictly forbidden, he had liked to sit this way ever since he was given this bedroom, when he was eight; he used to fit into the small space perfectly, but now he had to squeeze, and his knees were jackknifed up in front of his face. Rain was sluicing down the gray slate roof into the gutter. In the light of the street lamps, the road shone black; parked cars were plastered with wet leaves from the beeches and horse chestnuts in the muddy triangle of public garden opposite. His mother's high heels scraped fiercely in the empty street as she crossed to the car: she must have dressed up in her teaching clothes for the occasion. She was hanging on tightly to the strap of the bag slung over her shoulder.

She and Duncan dithered around the car under the half-globes of their umbrellas, probably quarrelling about who should drive; they seemed as small as dolls from where he watched. He supposed they were going to try to find Edgar Lennox at his house; they had been calling him on the phone all day, without getting through. It was strange to think of the two households, more or less unknown to each other before tonight, connected by this drama, awake in the city when everyone else was getting ready for sleep.

Hours later—he wasn't sure how many hours, as he'd fallen asleep at his desk while revising for the geography G.C.S.E. exam he had on Monday morning—Noah woke to the sound of his mother's voice in the house again. She sounded like she did when she'd had too much wine at parties: rash and loud, extravagantly righteous. He went out to listen, leaning over the bannister and sliding noiselessly down, a few steps at a time. The steep and narrow staircase, the core of the skinny house, drew sound upward. Above his head, an ancient skylight as wide as the stairwell rattled under the rain, leaking into a strategically placed bucket. His parents and Rufus and Em were crowded at the foot of the stairs, in the hallway's jumble of boots and bikes and baskets, junk mail, umbrellas dripping on the gray and white tiles. His mother still had her fawn mac on.

"I thought he'd be ashamed," she was saying, "if I told him that Lottie was marrying him because she thinks he's a great man. But it was obvious that he thinks he is one, too."

"Is he one?" Rufus asked.

"Don't be ridiculous. What would he be doing teaching in a second-rate music department at a provincial university?"

"I thought you said the department was something wonderful."

"That was before this."

"He does some film and television work if he can get it," Duncan said. "All fairly high-toned. And he writes for the cathedral choir. Greatness, of course, wouldn't necessarily make him any better, as far as Lottie's concerned."

"He said that he could see how it must look from our point of view, from what he called 'any ordinary perspective.' "

"How dare he think we're ordinary?" Em raged.

"He said that the erotic drive was a creative force he felt he had to submit to."

"Oh, yuck! Hideous!"

"Hattie, he didn't say that, *exactly*."

"And what was his wife like? Was she there? What's her name?"

"Valerie. Val, he calls her. She was frosty. She said, 'Whatever happens, I keep this house,' as if that were something we were after. The house wasn't at all what you'd expect, anyway, not arty: stuffy and old-fashioned. I should think the wife's about my age, but she's let herself go—gray ponytail, no makeup, one of those girlish dowdy skirts with an elastic waistband."

"She was fierce," Duncan said. "I'd have been frightened of her, in his shoes."

"She wouldn't sit down; she stood up with her back against the wall, as if she were mounting guard over something. All she said was that Lottie would soon learn. They have a son, about the same age as Noah."

"Did she know about it all already?"

"She hadn't known for long—he'd just told her."

"We walked in on it all. We were the aftershock."

"Where is Lottie, anyway?"

"It has to run its course," Duncan said. "We're not in a position to prevent anything."

"It can't be allowed to run its course, Duncan! What if they actually went through with this crazy wedding?"

He groaned consolingly. "She's an adult—she's nineteen. Worse things happen at sea."

Noah turned and saw that Lottie was standing in her nightdress on the stairs just behind him. She put her finger to her lips. Her eyes behind her glasses were black pits. She was shaken with waves of violent trembling, gripping the bannister to steady herself, probably because she had swallowed too many of the caffeine tablets she claimed she was addicted to; and, no doubt, also because she was exalted and frightened at her ability to raise this storm in adult lives. Noah felt a familiar irritation with her exaggerations, mixed with protectiveness. He and Lottie had grown up very close, adrift from the rest of the family in their bedrooms in the attic. He knew how passionately she succumbed to the

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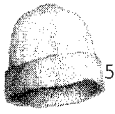

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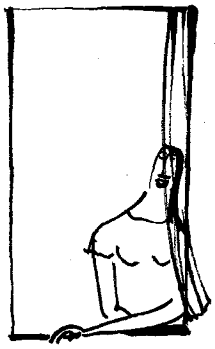
roles she dreamed up for herself. She won't be able to get out of this one, he thought. She can't stop now.



The wedding was held in a registry office, with a blessing at a church afterward; Edgar insisted on the Elizabethan prayer book and the Authorized Version of the Bible. He composed, for the occasion, a setting for Spenser's "Epithalamion" and one of his students sang it at the reception, which was in a sixteenth-century manor house with a famous garden that belonged to the university. Hattie refused to have anything to do with it all; she shut herself in at home with her detective novels. Noah drank a lot and befriended Edgar's son, Harold, who had floppy pale hair and a choral scholarship at a cathedral school; he jumped like a shot bird if anyone spoke to him unexpectedly.

Emily said that Lottie's white suit looked like a child's nurse costume—all it needed was a sewn-on red cross. Lottie was wearing contact lenses and, without her glasses, her face seemed weakly, blandly expectant. A white flower fastened behind her ear slid gradually down her cheek during the course of the afternoon until it was bobbing against her chin. She clung to Edgar with uncharacteristic little movements, touching at his hand with her fingertips, dropping her forehead to rest against his upper arm while he spoke, or throwing back her head to gaze into his face.

"It won't last," Duncan reassured his other children.

To Edgar's credit, he seemed sheepish under the family's scrutiny, and did his best to jolly Lottie along, circulating with her arm tucked into his, playing the gentle public man, distinguished in his extreme thinness, his suit made out of some kind of rough gray silk. You would have picked him out in any gathering as subtle and thoughtful and well informed. But there weren't really quite enough people at the reception to make it feel like a success: the atmosphere was constrained; the sun never came out from behind a mottled thick lid of cloud. After the drink ran out and the students had melted away, too much dispiriting white hair seemed to show up in the knots of guests remaining, like snow in the flower beds. Duncan overheard someone, sotto voce, refer to the newlyweds as "Little Nell and her grandfather."

Valerie phoned Lottie a week or so after the wedding to ask whether she knew that Edgar had tried the same thing the year before with the student who had sung at the reception, a tall beautiful black girl with a career ahead of her: she'd had the sense to tell him where to go. "To fuck off," Valerie enjoyed enunciating precisely, as if she hadn't often used that word. Everyone knew about this because Valerie had also telephoned Hattie. When Hattie asked Lottie about it, Lottie only made one of her horrible new gestures, folding her hands together and letting her head droop, smiling secretively into her lap. "It's all right, Mum," she said. "He tells me everything. We don't have secrets. Soraya is an exceptional, gifted young woman. I love her, too."

Hattie hated the way every opinion Lottie offered now seemed to come from both of them: we like this; we always do that; we don't like this. They didn't like supermarkets; they didn't like Muzak in restaurants; they didn't like television costume dramas. As Duncan put it, they generally found that the modern world came out disappointingly below their expectations. Hattie said that she wasn't ready to have Edgar in her house yet.

The university agreed that it was acceptable for Lottie to continue with her studies, as long as she didn't take any of Edgar's classes; but, of course, he carried on working with her on her violin playing. Her old energy seemed to be directed inward now; she glowed with the promise of her future. She grew paler than ever, and wore her hair loose, and bought silky indeterminate dresses at the charity shops. Hattie saw her unexpectedly from behind once and thought for a moment that her own daughter was a stranger, a stumpy little child playing on the streets in clothes from a dress-up box. Edgar and Lottie were renting a flat not far from Hattie and Duncan, tiny, with an awful galley kitchen and the landlord's furniture, but filled with music. Edgar had to pay about half his salary to Valerie to cover his share of the mortgage on the house and the part of

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Harold's schooling that wasn't paid for by the scholarship, so he and Lottie were pretty hard up, but at first they carried this off, too, as if it were a sign of something rare and fine.

"God knows what they eat," Hattie said. "Lottie doesn't know how to boil an egg. Probably Edgar doesn't know how to boil one, either. I'll bet he's had women running around him all his life."

Noah reported that they often had Chinese takeaway.

Then Lottie began to have babies. Familiarity had just started to silt up around the whole improbable idea of her and Edgar as a couple—high-minded, humorless, poignant in their unworldliness—when everything jolted onto this new track. Three diminutive girls arrived in quick succession, and life at Lottie and Edgar's, which had seemed to drift with eighteenth-century underwater slowness, snapped into noisy, earthy, and chaotic contemporaneity. Lottie in pregnancy was as swollen as a beach ball; afterward, she never recovered her neat boxy little figure, or that dreamily submissive phase of her personality. She became bossy, busy, cross; she abandoned her degree. She chopped off her hair with her own scissors, and mostly wore baggy tracksuit bottoms and T-shirts. Their tiny flat was submerged under packs of disposable nappies, cots, toys, washing, nursing bras and breast pads, a playpen, books on babies, books for babies. The tenant below them left in disgust, and they moved downstairs for the sake of the extra bedroom. As soon as the girls could toddle, they trashed Edgar's expensive audio equipment. He had to spend more and more time in his room at the university, anyway—he couldn't afford to turn down any commissions. Now Lottie spoke with emotion only about her children and about money.

The girls were all christened, but Lottie was more managerial than rapt during the ceremonies: Had everyone turned up who had promised (Rufus wouldn't)? Was Noah capturing the important moments on his video camera? Why was Harold in a mood? With the fervor of a convert to practicality, she planned her days and steered through them. Duncan taught her to drive, and she bought a battered old Ford Granada, unsubtle as a tank, and fitted it with child seats, ferrying the girls around from nursery to swimming to birthday parties to baby gym. She was impatient if anyone tried to turn the conversation around to art or music, unless it was Tiny Tots ballet. She seemed to be carrying around, under the surface of her intolerant contempt for idleness, a burning unexpressed message about her used-up youth, her put-aside talent.

"She ought to be abashed," Hattie said once. "We *warned* her. Instead, she seems to be angry with *us*."

Hattie had been longing for early retirement, but she decided against it, fearing that the empty days might only fill up with grandchildren. She believed that in the mirror she could see the signs in her face—like threads drawn tight—of the strain of these extra years of teaching that she had not wanted.

"Poor old Lottie," Duncan said.

"Lottie isn't old. Poor Edgar."

At weekends, Duncan sometimes came home to find Edgar taking refuge at his kitchen table, drinking tea while the children made scones or collages with Hattie. Edgar didn't do badly with them, considering, but it could take him three-quarters of an hour to get all three little girls stuffed into coats and mittens and boots and pushchairs, ready to go. Physically, he was rather meticulous and pedantic. If Lottie was with him, she would push his fine long fingers brusquely aside and take over the zipping and buttoning. "Here, let me do it," she'd snap. To his credit, Edgar didn't seem to resent the intrusion of the babies into his life, or even to be wiped out by them, exactly: he gave himself over to their existence with a kind of bemused wonder. He drew himself down to their level, noticing everything they noticed, becoming involved in their childish chatter and speculation, as Lottie didn't have time to be. They adored him—they ran to cling to his legs whenever their mummy was cross. Edgar's appearance was diminished, though, from what it had once been: his white hair had thinned and was cut shorter and lay down more tamely on his head; his clothes were the ordinary dull things anyone could buy in a supermarket. Hattie realized with surprise that it must have been Valerie who was behind the charcoal-gray linen shirts, the silk suits, the whole production of Edgar as exceptional and distinguished.

When Emily got pregnant with her first child, Lottie's youngest was nine

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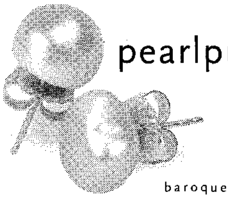
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months old, and Charis, her eldest, was five. Lottie dumped sacks of used baby things on Emily one evening without warning. "Chuck them out if you don't want them," she said. "I've got no more use for them. I've had my tubes tied."

After he finished his degree, Noah went to London and found work intermittently as an assistant cameraman on small film projects. He dropped in at Lottie's whenever he came home, and they fell easily into their old, companionable closeness. She fed him whatever awful mush she had cooked for tea. He was useful for swinging his nieces about and throwing them in the air, all the rough play that Edgar had to be careful of. Often, Edgar wasn't there; Noah assumed that he was working in his room at the university.

One summer evening, Noah was lying on his back on the floor in Lottie's front room. Two floor-length sash windows opened from this room onto a wrought-iron balcony; Lottie had made Edgar fix bars across, to stop the girls from getting out there. A warm incense of balsam poplar mingled with petrol fumes breathed from the street. They had drunk the bottle of wine that Noah had brought with their teatime mush; while they were giving the girls a bath, Lottie had produced triumphantly from the back of a cupboard a sticky bottle half full of Bacardi that nobody liked, and now they were drinking that, mixed with black-currant cordial, because that was all she had. "We'll be horribly, pinkly, sick," Lottie predicted. The girls were asleep at last. While Noah lay supine, Lottie crawled around him on her hands and knees, grunting with the effort, putting away in primary-colored plastic boxes the primary-colored toys that were strewn like strange manna all around the carpet.

"I'm gray," she complained. "My life's so gray."

"When does Edgar get back from work?"

"Don't be thick, Noah. Ed's retired. The university couldn't keep on employing him forever. He's seventy-two this year. Why d'you think I've been going on to you about how hard up we are?"

"Where is he, then?"

"At Valerie's, I expect."

Noah opened his eyes in surprise, angling his head up from the floor to get a look at her. "Oh!"

"That's where he usually is."

"Is that all right?"

"Why shouldn't he? When we've been paying half the mortgage for all these years—at least that's finished at last, thank Christ. There's a room there where he can work; it's impossible here. And we don't have space for a piano. He still likes to write at a piano, before he puts it on the computer."

"So they get on O.K., him and Valerie?"

"She brings him coffee and plates of sandwiches while he's working. She unplugs the phone in the hall, in case it disturbs him. He plays things to her. I expect that sometimes while he's in the throes of composition he forgets he doesn't live there anymore, in that quiet house."

"Mum said the house was old-fashioned."

"It is old-fashioned. Full of antiques, from Valerie's mother, but Valerie wouldn't know how to show them off. Valerie doesn't have a showing-off bone in her body. She's all complications. She's a gifted cellist, apparently, but she can't play in public."

"I suppose you've got to know her."

Lottie aimed bricks at a box. "Not in the face-to-face sense. Occasionally she and I do have to talk, about Harold's allowance or whatever."

"He doesn't still have an allowance?"

"Not after we had the talk. On my wedding night, I tell you, it was like Bartók's 'Bluebeard's Castle.' My metaphorical wedding night—I don't actually mean that one night in particular. Behind the first door, the torture chamber; behind the second door, a lake of tears, and so on. Behind the last door were his other wives, alive and well. Well, the first one isn't exactly alive, but I could tell you all about her."

"I'd forgotten there was a first one."

"Danish, actress, had problems with her abusive father, drank."

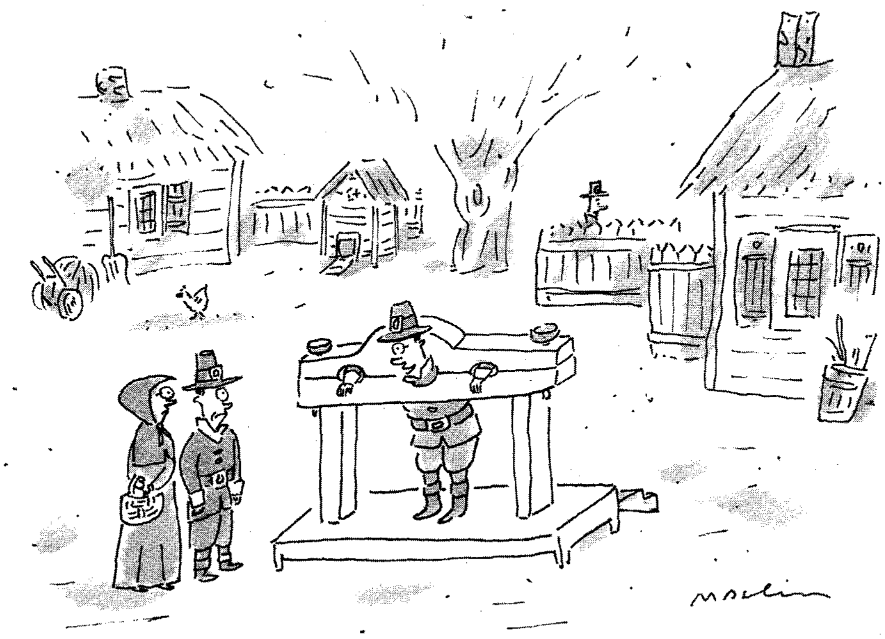
"He goes on about them?"

"Not really. They're just his life—they crop up, as you can imagine. There's a lot of life behind him to crop up. Don't forget, once Valerie was the one he ran away with."

"I'd never thought of it like that."

"Were the babies my revenge? Poor Ed, I've nearly killed him."

Lottie lay down on the floor, head to toe with Noah, holding her glass on the soft mound of her stomach, tilting the vis-



"I didn't do anything wrong—I just like being restrained."

• •

cous red drink backward and forward as she breathed.

"Do you know what I did the other week? I was so angry about something—can't remember what—that I drove up to the recycling depot with the babies in the back of the car to throw my violin into the skip for miscellaneous household waste."

Noah sat upright. "The one Mum and Dad bought for you? Didn't that cost loads of money? Thousands?"

"I didn't actually do it. I looked down into the skip and got the violin out of the case to throw, and then I put it away again. Apart from anything else, I told myself, I could always sell it. And it's possible I might want to start again, when this is over. But probably I won't, ever."

"Is Edgar any good?" Noah demanded drunkenly, suddenly aggressive. "I mean, is his music really, actually any good?"

"Noah, how can you ask that? You're not allowed to ask that." Although Lottie protested, the question seemed intimately known to her, as if she had thrown herself too often against its closed door. "How can I judge? I can't tell. I *think* he's good. He's writing something at the moment, for strings. It'll get a première at the Festival. It's something new, different. Actually, I think it might be lovely."

Just then they heard Edgar's deliberate slow step on the stairs, his key in the door to the flat.

"He pretends this new piece is for me. But I know it's not *about* me."

Edgar stood squinting at them from the doorway, getting used to the light; his khaki hooded waterproof and stooped shoulders gave him, incongruously, the toughened, bemused aura of an explorer returned. Noah imagined how infantile he and Lottie must look, lying on the floor among the toys with their bright-red drinks, and how uninteresting youth must sometimes seem.

"We're finishing up that Bacardi, Ed," Lottie said, enunciating too carefully. "Do you want some?"

Edgar's eyes these days had retreated behind his jutting cheekbones and sprouting eyebrows; something suave had gone out of his manner. He said that he would rather have a hot drink. Forgetfully he waited, as if he expected Lottie to jump up and make it for him. When he remembered after a moment, and went into the kitchen to do it himself, he didn't imply the least reproach; he was merely absorbed, as if his thoughts were elsewhere. Noah saw how hungrily from where she lay Lottie followed the ordinary kitchen music—the crescendo of the kettle, the chatter of crockery, the punctuation of cupboard doors, the chiming of the spoon in the cup—as if she might hear in it something that was meant for her. ♦

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THE CRITICS

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WILD THING

Rudolf Nureyev, onstage and off.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

If ever there was an artist who invited the retributive sort of biography that is in fashion these days, it is Rudolf Nureyev. Nureyev, as a friend of his put it, did things that are "absolutely out of our habits." He dropped ballerinas on the floor, threw dinner plates at people, and blew his nose on hotel towels. He repaid his greatest benefactor by going to bed with the man's wife. But Julie Kavanagh, in her "Nureyev: The Life" (Pantheon; $37.50), doesn't go for the bait. Nureyev may have behaved badly, she says, but he was bigger than that.

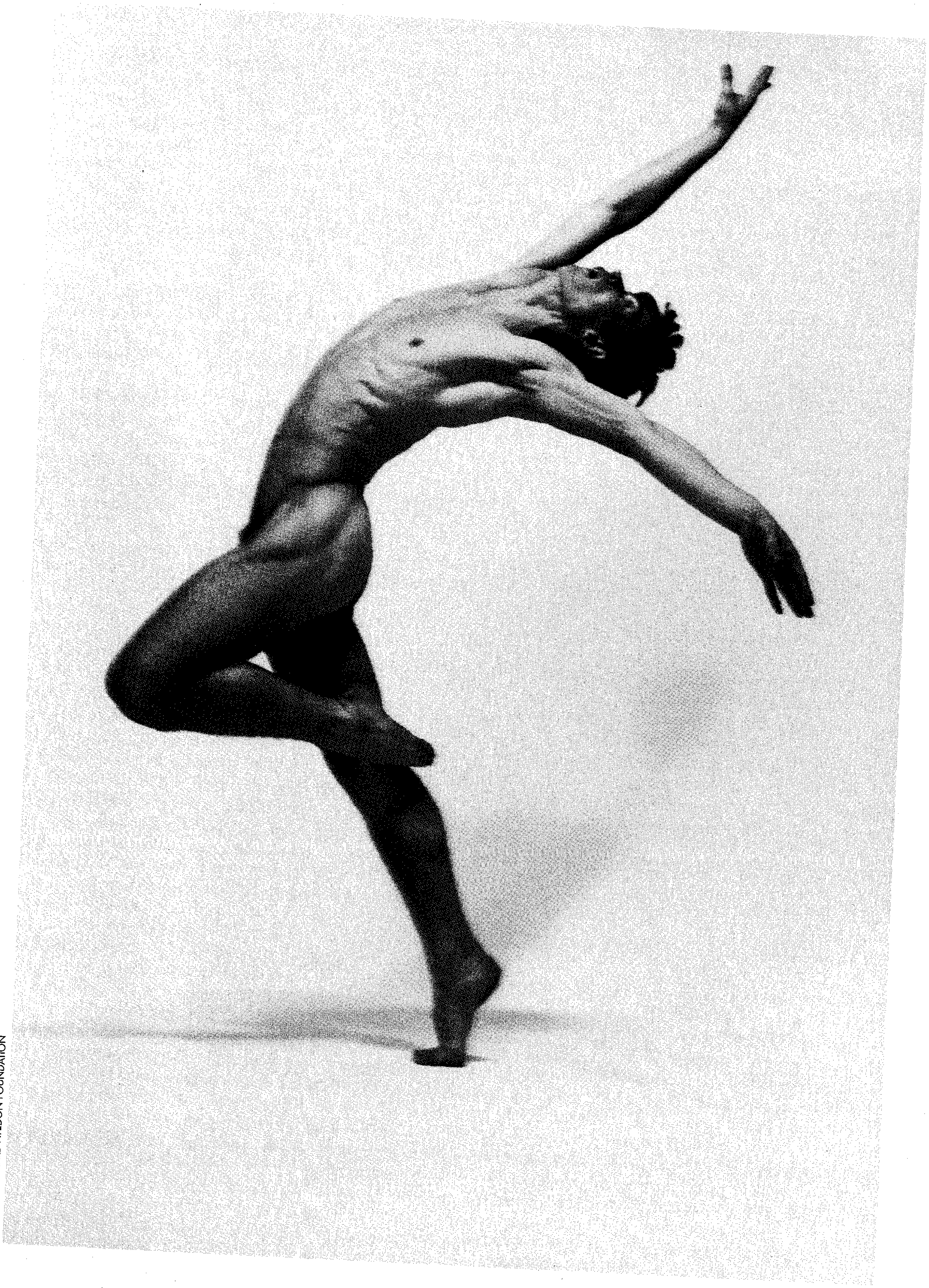
Nureyev was born in 1938, and, like most Soviet citizens who didn't starve to death in the years that followed, he almost did. He grew up in Ufa, a small town in the republic of Bashkiria. The family was Tatar, and poor—the father was a security guard in a factory. But Ufa had an opera house, and, one New Year's Eve, Nureyev's mother bought a single ticket to the ballet and sneaked her whole family in, including the seven-year-old Rudolf. He later said that it was that night, as he watched "The Song of the Cranes," a sort of Bashkirian "Swan Lake," that he received the call. In dance biographies, one hears suspiciously often of these thunderclaps, but I think they should be credited if they are soon followed by intense study. Within a year, Rudolf was enrolled in a ballet class, and from then on he thought of little else. His older sister Rosa, who was also studying dance, sometimes brought home costumes for him to look at. "I would spread them out on the bed and gaze at them," he later recalled. "I would fondle them for hours, smooth them and smell them. . . . I was like a dope addict." But, because he was stuck in Bashkiria, it was not until he was almost past his teens that he found his way to a serious professional school, the Kirov Ballet's Vaganova Academy, in Leningrad.

Kavanagh is especially good on Nureyev's early years, when his arrogance was most explainable and touching. On his first day at the Vaganova school, she writes, "the pale seventeen-year-old, wearing a thin sweater tightly cinched with a large belt to emphasize his slim waist, and carrying his belongings in a bag no bigger than a briefcase, was shown his living quarters—a large, light dormitory shared with nineteen other students whom Rudolf decided to ignore." He soon began studying with Alexander Pushkin, a renowned men's teacher and a sort of saint of Russian ballet. Pushkin's specialty was turning rangy teen-age boys into classical artists. As his students reported, the combinations that he assigned felt natural to the body, at the same time that they seemed to take you to the very center of classicism: harmony, "sweet reason." Pushkin was also extremely kind and patient; you couldn't provoke him. Finally, he cultivated individuality. If he asked for one step and you did another, you were not scolded. In all the world, it would have been hard to find a better teacher for the young Nureyev, who was way behind in his training, and sensitive about that—indeed, sensitive about everything. He later described his daily class with Pushkin as "two holy hours." In his other hours, he broke every rule in the school and swore at every teacher and coach, but Pushkin came to his rescue. When he had tantrums at rehearsals, Pushkin would be called in. "Rudik," he would say, "one can't behave like this. Try some pirouettes . . . that will calm you down."

In 1958, at the age of twenty, Nureyev was asked to join the Kirov. The following year, he tore a ligament in his leg and needed special care, so Pushkin invited him to move in with him and his wife, Xenia, a pretty and strong-willed forty-two-year-old dancer, who had just retired. Nureyev was soon in bed with Xenia. This painful story was whispered about for years. (It was presented as fact in Diane Solway's 1998 biography, "Nureyev.") Kavanagh defends Nureyev. Xenia, she says, seduced him, and she was not a person one said no to. Nureyev was frightened and ashamed but also curious. So it happened, and Xenia fell in love. She darned his socks and cooked his dinners. She attended his classes and rehearsals, and she shooed away any of his friends who might compete for his time. Did Pushkin realize what was going on? No one knows, Kavanagh says, but the couple's apartment consisted of only one room. I doubt that he was fooled. His attentions to Nureyev remained undiminished, however.

Soon afterward, Nureyev took a second lover, this one male: Teja Kremke, a ballet student from East Germany. For the record, Nureyev was bisexual (Xenia was not the last of the women), but most of his heterosexual contacts seem to have had a clear practical payoff. Not that his homosexual contacts were unuseful. The French ballerina Ghislaine Thesmar, a friend of his, said, "He was like those instinctive predators who know precisely where to land and take their prey." Kremke was an amateur filmmaker, and he surreptitiously filmed many of Nureyev's performances at the

Nureyev, photographed by Richard Avedon in Paris, in 1961, the year that the Kirov star defected from the Soviet Union.



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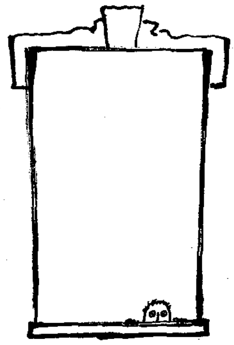
Kirov, to help him analyze his shortcomings. Kavanagh unearthed these films, in Germany, and they permit her, alone among Western critics, to speak with authority and in detail about his early, Russian style.

Because of Nureyev's late training, that style was unrefined. In the Russian films, Kavanagh says, his shoulders are hunched, his landings are heavy, and his hands and feet flap. But what he lacked in polish he made up for in intensity. He launched himself into fabulous bravura steps; he breathed fire. And he told you he was doing so. Most ballet dancers aim for a look of effortlessness. Nureyev did the opposite. "He comes onto the stage as if into an arena," his friend Violette Verdy later said. "Is he going to be eaten by the lion or not?" For the most part, his Kirov colleagues were unimpressed. They thought he was a showoff, and an untidy one. But it was that combination that won the hearts of his audience. He was a titan, but young and crazy—in other words, very appealing.

An added attraction, for some, was his androgyny. Russian male dancers of that time tended to be strong, solid, cylindrical fellows. Nureyev found this ugly, so he modelled himself on the female dancers. He cultivated a highly pulled-up torso and did elaborate, wafting arm movements. To make his legs look longer, he stood on a high half-point. Everything about him was stretched, angled, "placed"—like a ballerina. Today, this look is standard for men, in Russia and in the West, but in the Soviet nineteen-fifties it was considered effeminate. When he made his début in "Giselle," a fellow-dancer said, "We had a girl and another girl as the boy." To many of his fans, however, his stylized self-presentation seemed exotic.



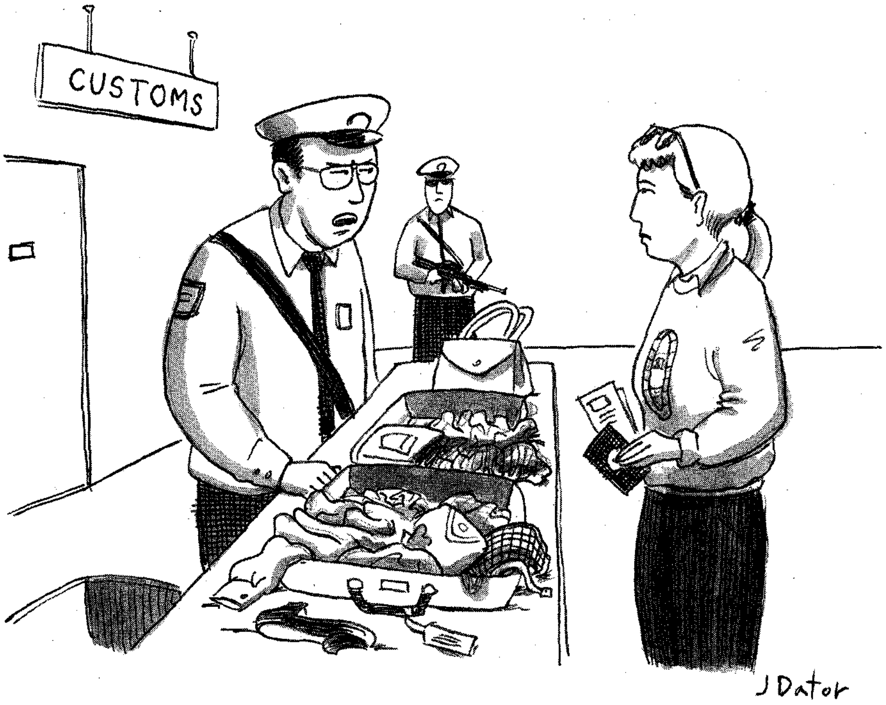
That was not the limit of his insubordination. Once, when he was dancing "Don Quixote," the intermission was extended to almost an hour as Nureyev sat in his dressing room, refusing to put on the trunks that, for modesty, Russian male dancers wore in those days. He wanted to perform in tights (again, standard practice today), and he finally won, at which point all the other young men also insisted on discarding the trunks. Needless to say, he was unpopular with the authorities, but he didn't care about that. One day, the K.G.B. invited him for a talk and asked him why he had not joined Komsomol, the Communist youth organization. He said he didn't have time for such nonsense. This note of defiance carried over into his performances, and made them more exciting. At his curtain calls, Kavanagh says, the chandeliers shook.

To us, today, it seems inconceivable that Nureyev would have remained in the Soviet Union. But this was before the period of the glamorous defecting dancers. (That period was initiated by him.) To most Soviet dancers of the time, defection was not a conceivable choice. In the end, though, the authorities forced his hand, after he forced theirs. In the spring of 1961, the Kirov went on tour to Paris and London. The company did not want to bring Nureyev—if anyone was going to defect, they figured, he would be the one—but the tour presenter had heard about the wonder boy and insisted on having him. So they brought him, and assigned just about every K.G.B. agent on the tour to tail him. He paid no mind, as usual. He made friends with French ballet people; they took him to movies, to shops, to dinner parties—all of which he should have asked permission for, and didn't. The authorities were furious, but he was the major attraction of the Paris season, so they let him stay until it was over.

Then, when the dancers were assembled at Le Bourget airport to fly to London, Nureyev was taken aside and told that he was not going with them: he was urgently needed for a performance at the Kremlin, and a Russian plane would soon be taking him home. He burst into tears, and so did many of the other dancers, for they knew that this meant something worse than his missing the London season. It meant disciplinary action—perhaps a ban on his ever again going on tour, perhaps a transfer to a provincial company. What happened next reads like a thriller; there was even a chase scene. A French friend of Nureyev's, summoned from a pay phone, sped to the airport in a taxi, racing against the Russian plane, to give him instructions and alert the French police. She found him in the bar with two K.G.B. men and, under the guise of whispering a tender farewell to him, she told him where the French plainclothesmen were standing, a few feet away. Shaking with fear, Nureyev got up, walked over to the policemen, and asked for asylum. There followed some yelling and shoving, and then it was over.

During his Russian years, Nureyev was already obsessively dedicated to his work. His defection made him more so. As he put it, "I felt that, should I ever stay in the West, nobody would rush up to me to put me on a plate and hand me around like a cake. I would have to fight for myself." Part of the fight was to perfect his technique. In Russia, he had seen some pirated movies of Western ballet. One dancer who especially dazzled him was Erik Bruhn. Bruhn, a Dane nine years older than Nureyev, was an Apollonian dancer, with neat feet, a beautiful line, and a natural, unforced nobility—exactly what his Soviet admirer lacked. Nureyev swore that if he ever got to the West he would find Bruhn's teacher and "go there and *suck*"—which, once he defected, he immediately did. More than that, he tracked down Bruhn in Copenhagen and began an affair with him. Bruhn became the love of his life. Day after day, they worked together in the studio, and in the heat of their communion Nureyev refined his technique.

The other great influence on him during these early years was Margot Fonteyn. In 1961, Fonteyn was the lead ballerina of England's Royal Ballet—actually, the lead ballerina of Western ballet. Like Bruhn, she was Nureyev's opposite: seemly, understated. He longed to dance with her, but whereas he was twenty-three she was forty-two, and ready to retire. She did perform with him, however, and something happened between them. He regalvanized her, and for the next decade they enjoyed what was probably the most famous partnership in twentieth-century ballet. Teen-agers, celebrity hounds—indeed, the general public—suddenly began lining up to buy tickets to the ballet. At the end of the show, they would howl, and tear their programs into confetti to throw at their idols, whom



"Why didn't you bring a cardigan or a lightweight jacket?"

they summoned back for twenty, twenty-five, curtain calls. The Fonteyn-Nureyev phenomenon was a major contributor to the "dance boom" of the nineteen-sixties and seventies. They made the art more popular than it had ever been.

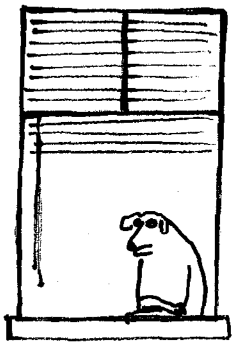
The best-known film of Fonteyn and Nureyev is of a 1965 performance of the pas de deux from "Le Corsaire," in which, fittingly, Fonteyn appears as a dainty maiden in a blue tutu and Nureyev as an Oriental slave, in silver harem pants, swearing fealty to her. (There is a commercial video of this: "An Evening with the Royal Ballet," distributed by Kultur.) Not only does the film demonstrate the feats that Nureyev could accomplish at the height of his powers; it shows what else made him a star—his proud manner, his fancy placement, his great happiness in dancing, and also his sex appeal. Almost everyone who describes Nureyev eventually compares him to an animal. They bore you to death with this, but it was true. He seemed an unleashed force, something undiscussable in the language of reason or morals. Friends of Nureyev have said how much he loved his body. His longtime masseur, Luigi Pignotti, said that what Nureyev really wanted was to make love to himself. In the "Corsaire" duet, he more or less does so, symbolically. People are still wondering if Fonteyn ever went to bed with Nureyev. Kavanagh doesn't call it, but she quotes Frederick Ashton, the Royal Ballet's artistic director during the late sixties, as saying that Fonteyn probably made love with him only in her mind, in the theatre. So did the audience, and it was better than the real thing.

By the end of the sixties, however, Fonteyn's second wind was pretty much used up. Meanwhile, the Royal Ballet was starting to feel that it was losing more than it gained from the Fonteyn-Nureyev partnership. In some measure, the two stars had devoured the company. Most of the big new productions were for them, and the big old productions were remade for them, or him. For various reasons, but above all in order to increase his time onstage, Nureyev forced the company to make substantial changes in its revered productions of "Swan Lake" and "Giselle." Many critics were shocked by this, and now they also found themselves deploring Nureyev's "bad taste." (He was a hammy actor, in the Soviet manner, and he went in for Kabuki-esque makeup. According to the dance photographer Keith Money, his eyebrows, once he pencilled them, looked like "black bananas.") Most serious of all was the fact that the couple was sidelining the Royal's younger dancers. In a notorious instance, Kenneth MacMillan, an up-and-coming house choreographer, made a new "Romeo and Juliet" in 1965 for two gifted young dancers, Lynn Seymour and Christopher Gable. At the last minute, for box-office reasons, the administration declared that Fonteyn and Nureyev would lead the first cast. Furthermore, once Nureyev was assigned to play Romeo, he began changing the choreography to suit himself. This episode created terribly hard feelings. The following year, MacMillan left the Royal, to take over the Berlin Opera Ballet, and Seymour went with him. Gable gave up dancing. Fonteyn reportedly felt guilty to the end of her days. Nureyev no doubt felt fine. But the Royal now began cutting back on the number of their performances. Fonteyn went off to attend to domestic problems. (Her husband, a Panamanian politician, had been shot by an associate, reportedly because he was having an affair with the man's wife, and he was now quadriplegic.) Nureyev turned to other companies.

Nureyev's dancing immediately raised the standard for male technique in the West. Look at any ballet film from the nineteen-fifties or even the sixties. The men have almost no turnout. Then look at films from the seventies, by which time the example of Nureyev, with his hundred-and-eighty-degree turnout, had sunk in. The men are all turned-out. Furthermore, even middle-rank dancers were attempting the sort of bravura steps that he had brought with him. He thus changed the audience as well. Before him, Western companies were considered as good or as bad as their ballerinas. Today, it is the man's variation—the barrel turns, the grande pirouette—that the audience hollers over. This started with Nureyev.

Then there are his productions of the Russian classics. For various companies, Nureyev mounted new versions of "Swan Lake," "The Sleeping Beauty," "Raymonda," "Don Quixote," "The Nutcracker," and "La Bayadère." The last was the most important. When Nureyev arrived, people in the West had had only a few glimpses of this early Marius Petipa ballet. In 1963, at the Royal Ballet, he staged its Act III, the "Shades," which is like a graduate course in Russian classicism. According to Kavanagh, the production changed the Royal, teaching its dancers to add Russian sweep and plasticity to their correctness—to put an engine in their car.

Such achievements must be measured against Nureyev's weaknesses. His "Shades" was a fairly close copy of the Kirov version, but in many of his other productions of the classics he "modernized" the story by adding a lot of claptrap about sex and violence which was out of date even in the sixties. A worse disfigurement was his choreography. To beef up his roles in the classics, he had to put in more dancing. He also made a number of original ballets. Most of this material is littered with small, fiddly steps—petits battements, ronds de jambe—that go on forever without going anywhere. Ninette de Valois, the artistic director who hired him for the Royal, said that Nureyev had "a certain talent as a choreographer, but not much." This is generous.



His problem went far beyond choreography, however. Nureyev was utterly ruled by his narcissism. This meant not only that he had to be the star of every show; he also had to control rehearsals, even if the ballet wasn't by him and the choreographer was standing there. Furthermore, no matter what commitment he had made, he had to accept every other offer as well, so that he would often show up for rehearsals with only a few days to learn his role. All he wanted, ever, was to be onstage; he hated to rehearse. As a result, many choreographers wanted no part of him, and, therefore, he never really learned any style other than what he came with.

The choreographer he most wanted to work with was George Balanchine. Here, he felt, was the person who could make great things for him, give the jewel its proper setting. But when he approached Balanchine, in 1961, about joining New York City Ballet, he offered to work for him only two months a year. "Not long," he explained blandly. "Just for myself to learn the choreography." The rest of the time, he would dance elsewhere. But by the sixties almost no one in Balanchine's company was allowed to appear with other companies, let alone for most of the year. Furthermore, much that was central to Nureyev's appeal was not to Balanchine's liking. Nureyev was a star, a "personality," like Sarah Bernhardt or Caruso. To Balanchine, that was corny, and reprehensible. New York City Ballet did have stars, but they were there to serve the repertory. When they didn't, Balanchine let them go. Nureyev, Balanchine said, in an interview with *Esquire*, was "a one-man show, 'I, me, a beautiful man, alone.' . . . Frankly, we don't need this." Kavanagh has dug up some good dirt on how certain people close to Balanchine—Lincoln Kirstein, the co-founder and general director of New York City Ballet, and John Martin, the dance critic of the *Times*—took against Nureyev, and why. This is fascinating, but I don't think it had much bearing on Balanchine's decision. (Kavanagh finally says that.) By entering into discussions with Nureyev, I believe, he was just being polite to a fellow Kirov alumnus.

So Nureyev stayed at the Royal Ballet, and when, in time, the Royal wouldn't give him what he wanted he went to companies where his bargaining position was better; that is, to second-rank companies. Vienna Opera Ballet, Berlin Opera Ballet, the Royal Swedish Ballet, the National Ballet of Canada, the Australian Ballet: in hiring Nureyev as a guest artist, these troupes acquired enough box-office power to go on international tours. In return, they had to pay for his new versions of the classics and bench their young men, so that he could perform the leading role. (During the Australian Ballet's American tour of 1970-71, he danced in sixty-eight out of seventy shows.) They also had to put up with his tantrums. These were remarkable already in his years with the Royal Ballet. In the studio, to the horror of the other dancers, he would scream at Fonteyn: "Shit, shit, you dance like shit." Once, at a dress rehearsal, he tore his costume to shreds in front of fifty press photographers. (He thought it made his legs look short.) As time passed, his rages got worse. In Stockholm, he kicked the conductor's podium until it fell apart. This sounds amusing—it reminds you of Toscanini—but, for the companies, it was demoralizing. Furthermore, some of them were nearly bankrupted by his productions. When his "Sleeping Beauty" for the National Ballet of Canada went a hundred thousand dollars over budget, the chairman of the board had to mortgage his house.

The situation was shaming, but not to Nureyev. His life was harder now. Under the pressure of constant touring, his body was a wreck. Some days, he could barely walk. He consoled himself with luxuries. He had a baronial house near Richmond Park, in London, and a villa in the South of France. (Eventually, he also acquired an apartment in the Dakota, in New York; a four-hundred-and-fifteen-acre farm in Virginia; a sprawling apartment, filled with antiques, in Paris; and a small archipelago in the Gulf of Salerno.) But he was lonely. He seldom saw Fonteyn anymore, and the affair with Bruhn had ended. His love life was mostly what he found in bars or baths. His friendships, too, were an unedifying spectacle. Some decent people did love Nureyev, and Kavanagh quotes them saying how dear he could be, and how much fun. But her portrait of him with his entourage in the last two decades of his life looks like one of Shakespeare's scenes of the maddened king and his sycophantic courtiers. From the time of Xenia Pushkin, Nureyev always had a following of older women who would do almost anything for him. They fed him, they housed him. They went on tour with him and massaged his feet. Some of them pimped for him. To get these privileges, a woman had to have money, because Nureyev did not like to pay for anything. One of these women, Armen Bali, owned a restaurant in San Francisco where Nureyev, when he was on tour, would often turn up with his whole company after a performance. Asked if he paid for these banquets, Bali answered, "He didn't know how. He'd bring a hundred people and never even tip. What Rudolf gave you was himself." Then, when you displeased him, he gave you something else. His friend Jane Hermann was the director of the Metropolitan Opera House, a position in which she could be very useful to him. He

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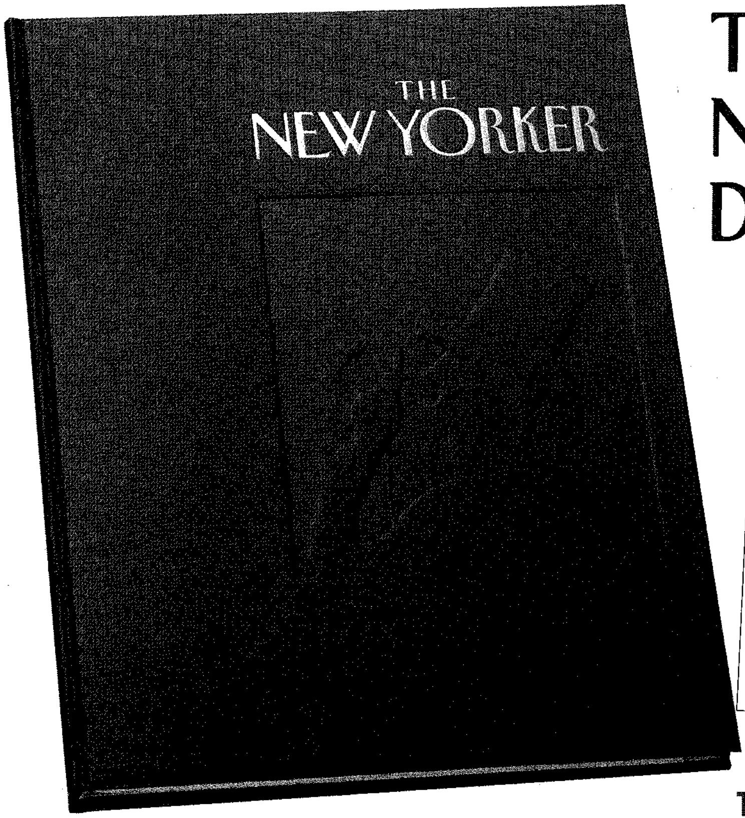

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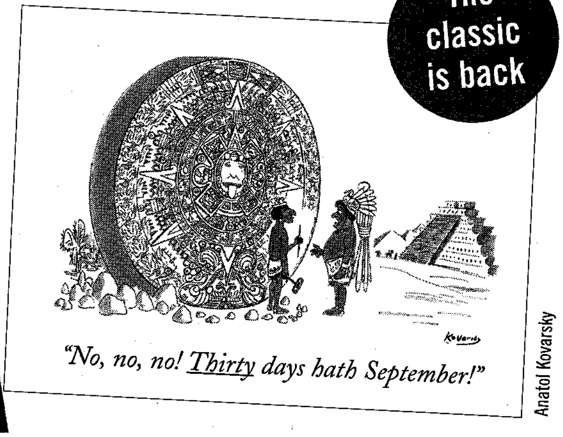

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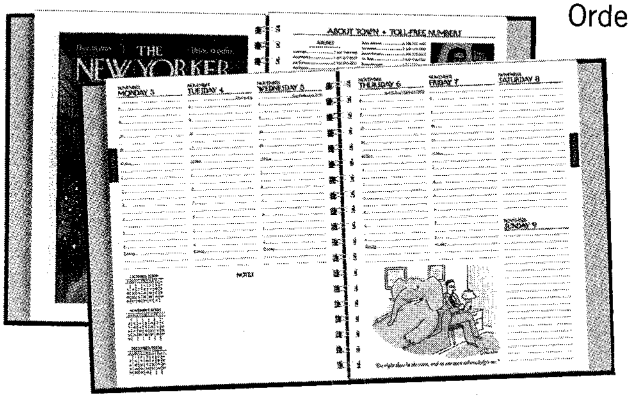

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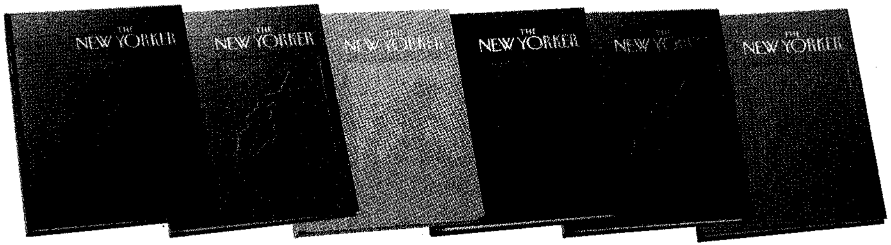

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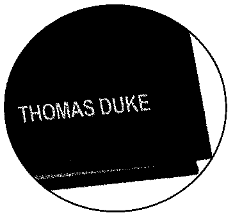

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therefore liked her until, for various reasons, he didn't. Then he let loose at her in a restaurant, screaming that she was a "Jewish cunt," among other things. Hermann stopped speaking to him. Armen Bali was bewildered by this: "All of a sudden she turns against him because he called her names. This is the thing he couldn't understand, why people are so sensitive."

In 1983, Nureyev undertook his last really big assignment: he became the artistic director of the Paris Opera Ballet, the oldest ballet company in the world. He is widely credited with giving that proud, hidebound institution the shaking up that it needed. He hired teachers who had non-French training; he brought in modern-dance choreographers. In the process, however, he developed a bitterly antagonistic relationship with the company. Two of the modern-dance choreographers left without finishing their ballets, because the dancers refused to attend their rehearsals. Twice, the company threatened to strike. Usually, he met their complaints with defiance. When a veteran teacher, Michel Renault, objected to Nureyev's interrupting his class to make corrections of his own, Nureyev broke his jaw. Renault sued and was awarded twenty-five hundred francs. "If I'd known it would be that little," Nureyev said, "I'd have hit him a second time."

Perhaps, to change anything whatsoever at the P.O.B., some breakage was required. But Nureyev was seldom able to mend things, because he was in Paris only half the year. The rest of the time, he was dancing with other companies. In 1988, the Paris Opera got a new general director, who demanded that Nureyev run the company twelve months a year. Nureyev responded by signing a three-year contract to perform in "The King and I" (as the king) in America—a full-time job. He thought that he could stonewall the P.O.B. He was wrong, and he was replaced as director in 1990.

Nureyev lived for three more years. He was given a diagnosis of H.I.V.-positive in 1984, his second year at the P.O.B. By the time he left the company, he was quite sick, and this was obvious onstage. Still, for every company that now declined to invite him again, there was another—typically in a place where the critics and the audience didn't know much about ballet—that wanted him. He danced in China and Japan and the Seychelles. Often, he would lurch through performances; at one point, he was dancing with a catheter inside his costume. On a provincial tour of England, in early 1991, there were cries of "Refund, refund!" at the end of a show.

So now he did what to him was the logical thing: he embarked on a new career, as a conductor. In mid-1991, three months after his first conducting lesson, he led a Viennese orchestra in a program of Haydn, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky. Later, he conducted in Romania, Poland, and Russia. No one in his circle tried to talk him out of this. Anything to get him off the stage.

At this point, if not before, a note of black comedy creeps into Kavanagh's story. Nureyev's friends felt sorry for him, and they were willing, in his last days, to let him use up their good will, their patience, their money. But his last days never seemed to come. In early 1992, Jane Hermann got a phone call from an associate of Nureyev's saying that if she wanted to see him again she should get over to his apartment now: "He's refusing medication." Hermann had not spoken to him since his tirade in the restaurant, but she hurried to his side, and to cheer him up, it seems—he was now bedridden—she told him that he had to get well, because she wanted him to conduct at the Met. He suddenly felt better, and a month later he conducted "Romeo and Juliet" for American Ballet Theatre at the Met. No one understood how he got through it. In the dressing room before the show, he didn't have the strength to do up his buttons. But at the post-performance party he asked Peter Martins, the artistic director of New York City Ballet, "When am I going to conduct for you?" He was also thinking about opening a ballet school in Russia, and was in discussions with the mayor of St. Petersburg about this. He could not get it into his head that he was dying. The end finally came in January of 1993. He was fifty-four. His last words were "Moby-Dick." The friend who was with him at the time said that that was the movie that was playing on the TV in his hospital room, but I wonder if he was planning another ballet.

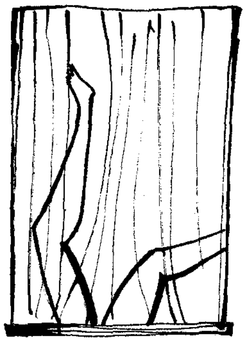
Kavanagh spent ten years on "Nureyev." She did a huge amount of research, and, accordingly, the book is long: seven hundred pages. I could have used less information on Nureyev's sex life, particularly since all the men report the same thing—that he was a bore in bed, "mechanical." ("I should have charged him," the choreographer Robert La Fosse said.) I also learned more than I wanted to about Nureyev's contacts with celebrities: how Natalie Wood chewed chicken bones with him and Madonna sent him flowers. On the other hand, there are times when what might seem excessive detail is just what we need. Kavanagh tells us the exact measurements of the Nureyev family's one-room apartment in Ufa (sixteen metres square) and how many windows it had, front and back. This is fine by me; I didn't know much about poverty in post-war Bashkiria. Kavanagh writes atmospherically about Ufa, and other matters. She is also good at providing context—how, for example, Nureyev fit into the Swinging Sixties—and because she was once a dancer she can quickly explain ballet subtleties: how a Russian jump differs from a Danish jump, and the like.

My only serious complaint about the book is that I think Kavanagh gave Nureyev too many breaks. When he makes a terrible ballet, she says so, and she never tries to cover over his opportunism, but she has a tendency to give us just the facts, and to avoid analysis. It seems to me, for example, that there was a connection between Nureyev's lack of moral feeling and the general unintelligence of his work—both his performances and his productions. And just as he had an entourage of yes-men, or yes-women, standing between him and the world, so there was a huge cliché machine surrounding him, an endless flow of effusions about how he was a lion, a tiger, a wild thing. Nureyev, and the "Nureyev phenomenon," did not appeal to our higher instincts. Kavanagh's previous book, a biography of Frederick Ashton, was more searching, and I think that is because she truly loved Ashton, and admired him as an artist, so that she felt he could survive close scrutiny. If I am not mistaken, she liked Nureyev much less, and steered clear of questions that reminded her of that. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

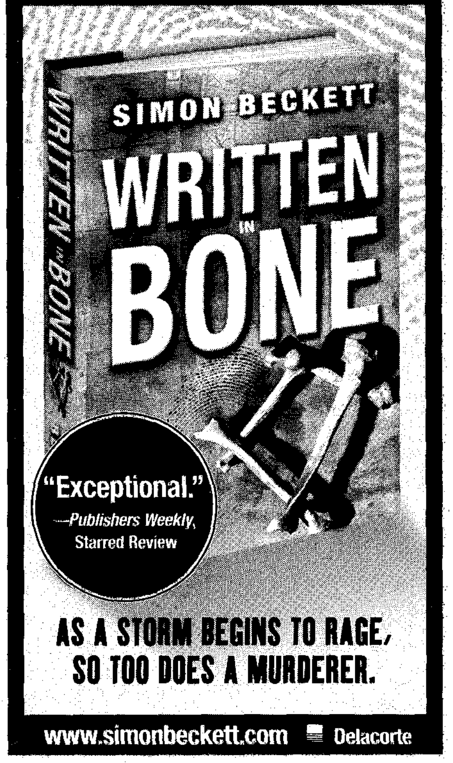
Caspian Rain, *by Gina B. Nahai (MacAdam Cage; $25).* In pre-revolutionary Tehran, a Jewish girl from the slums finds her marriage prospects dimmed by the disgraceful behavior of her siblings, among them a delusional opera singer manqué, an aged (i.e., nearing thirty) spinster, and a convert to Islam (who "couldn't tough it out as a Jew"). But, inspired by literature, "the domain of unemployed men and loose women," she takes charge of her destiny and rushes into a doomed union with an icy aristocrat. At times, the language of the novel strains toward the mythopoeic—the heroine's family evinces "the solitude of the charmed." But Nahai evokes even peripheral characters in vivid detail: the daughter of Argentine exiles (and suspected Nazis) blares tango music from her window and shows up at her parents' funeral with a hot-pink flower behind her ear; a former student activist, broken under torture by the secret police, scavenges for dead women's hair.

Songs Without Words, *by Ann Packer (Knopf; $24.95).* Packer's second novel examines the bonds of female friendship and how the connections formed by a childhood tragedy develop with age. Liz, married to a Bay Area technology executive and the mother of two teenagers, is preoccupied with yoga and creating a pleasurable environment for her children. Sarabeth, who was absorbed into Liz's family when her mother committed suicide, lives a makeshift existence in Berkeley. When Liz's daughter attempts to kill herself, a rift opens between the two women. The edginess and the moral complexity that defined Packer's previous work are more muffled here, perhaps because the characters seem too well-intentioned to be taken to task for their failings, but she shows a deft touch in framing emotional dilemmas, such as whether it is the duty of those who have been raised with affection to compensate those who have gone without.



Sacco and Vanzetti, *by Bruce Watson (Viking; $25.95).* When the news came, on August 23, 1927, that Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a shoemaker and a fish peddler, had been executed for shooting two men in a holdup, "life felt very grubby and mean," Katherine Anne Porter wrote, "as if we were all of us soiled and disgraced." The frenzy around the case drew on the fading ideals of the progressive era and the cynicism of the Jazz Age, and Watson provides an unusually evenhanded look at a case more often politicized than understood. The pair may have been railroaded, with dubious witnesses, a hanging judge, and dodgy (though not entirely dismissible) ballistics, but they were also part of an anarchist circle implicated in terrorist bombings—to a greater degree, perhaps, than their prosecutors realized. Sacco and Vanzetti certainly deserved a new trial; whether they were innocent martyrs is a trickier question.

The First Word, *by Christine Kenneally (Viking; $26.95).* Evolutionary linguistics has had a troubled history; in the nineteenth century, linguists declared that inquiries into the origin of language were futile, a view echoed more recently by Noam Chomsky. But in the past two decades the field has gained credibility, thanks to the work of a handful of notable practitioners, including Steven Pinker, Paul Bloom, Philip Lieberman, and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh. Kenneally provides an accessible account of this work, including many provocative findings. (It seems that George W. Bush's father, when scratching his nose on the phrase "Unlike some, he accepts responsibility," was demonstrating unconscious, archaic gestures used by nervous primates.) Of particular interest is an epilogue in which researchers themselves answer a question about whether babies, if stranded in the Galápagos, would produce "language in any form." Among many lengthy responses, Lieberman's is, simply, "No."



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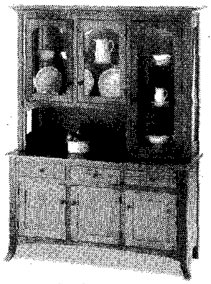

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ON TELEVISION

THE HEART OF TEXAS

"Friday Night Lights."

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

Fans of Texas high-school football, as those of us who were strangers to the ways of Pigskin Planet learned last season from the NBC small-town drama "Friday Night Lights," live in the hope that their team will "go to State"—play in the state championship in Dallas, in the Cowboys' stadium—and make their home town's dreams come true. When "Friday Night Lights" was renewed in May, its viewers, who had suffered through season-long anxiety that the show would be cancelled, and traumatic postseason worry that it wouldn't be renewed, felt as if they had not only gone to State but won the big game. The second season—woo hoo!—starts this Friday. Last season, the show first aired on Tuesdays, where it had the misfortune of competing against ABC's popular showcase for nonbiodegradable fabrics, "Dancing with the Stars." It was moved to Wednesdays, but didn't do well there, either. NBC has said that this year it wants to try to appeal to more women, who are apparently less inclined than men to check out the show, because they think it's just about football, and who, it is hoped, will stay with it once they do see it. Also in the service of this goal was NBC's announced, and possibly dunderheaded, decision to show less football on the program. There are two ways to look at this approach: on the one hand, you could say that, if tinkering is what it takes to keep the show on the air, go ahead; on the other, you could argue that changing the very nature of a show in order to get more people to watch it—even though it's no longer the same show that you wanted to get them to watch—is the kind of thing that makes even newborn babies laugh, shake their heads, and say, "That is soooooo typical of a network."

Kyle Chandler and Zach Gilford as coach and quarterback.

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I took a wait-and-not-see approach to "Friday Night Lights" last year, until an unlikely friend recommended it—a young filmmaker who had grown up in Manhattan in a literary and theatrical milieu and had no interest in sports. We were in the Museum of Natural History when we had this conversation, and when she told me that she and her husband were "addicted" to the show, even the animals in the dioramas were so stunned that they froze in their tracks. The following week, I watched an episode, and went from ignorance to bliss.

It's hard to say what's great about "Friday Night Lights" without feeling that you're emphasizing the wrong thing, because although the show's particulars are distinctive and special, it seems not to be made up of parts at all—to just be an organic whole. In short, it feels like life. The show isn't merely set in the world of West Texas football; it *is* that world. Watching it, you have a feeling of total immersion—in the (fictional) town of Dillon, in the lives of the football players and their parents, and in all the elements that determine people's fates in that dry, desolate, and depressed part of the country. This sensation is triggered in part by filmmaking technique and in part by the writing and the acting; but much of it is simply alchemical and wonderfully indefinable.

The show grew out of the book of the same name by H. G. Bissinger, who, in 1988, moved from the suburbs of Philadelphia to Odessa, Texas, to follow the Permian Panthers for a season. (Permian High School gets its name from the geological region beneath much of West Texas, the Permian Basin, whence comes the oil that has fuelled both the fortunes and the failures of Odessa.) Living there with his wife and their two small children, Bissinger participated in the local life but also remained clear-eyed, and didn't flinch from reporting on racism in the town, on the grim economy, on the townspeople's desperate need to make heroes of the local boys, or on their dismissal of those same heroes if they turned out to be merely human. The 1988 Panthers made it to the semifinals only to lose a game that they should have—or, at least, could have—won. Bissinger doesn't romanticize the might-have-beens in the lives of the people he writes about; he's not sappy about the toll that the sport takes on the kids and on their families, or about the town's self-interested demands on the young hopefuls, but the point of the book isn't to run down something that's (to many people) glorious and turn it into something mundane. He's able to get at both the larger-than-life and the regular-old-life-size aspects of his subject.

A movie version of "Friday Night Lights" came out in 2004, but it used only the top layer of the book's themes (winning; losing; and maybe next year), telling the story of the Panthers' season in a conventional way. It was directed by Peter Berg, who also developed the TV series, for which he reached deeper into the book to get at its darker core (and, in order to keep the story going beyond its fact-based, yearlong frame, fictionalized it—the town is still Odessa-like, but the series is set in the present, and the TV Panthers, at the end of the show's first season, win the state championship). The opening credits for "Friday Night Lights" say that the series is "inspired by" Bissinger's book, rather than "based on" it. Which doesn't mean that the show isn't about football: as Bissinger says in his book, "Football stood at the very core of what the town was about, not on the outskirts, not on the periphery. It had nothing to do with entertainment and everything to do with how people felt about themselves."

Berg, who wrote and directed the first episode and is also one of the series' executive producers, gets you right down in the middle of it all. The show is filmed documentary style with a handheld camera, meaning that you're always aware of a sensibility and an intelligence at work. A lot of scenes are shot from a car—not establishing shots that indicate whose house the next scene will take place in but exploratory shots: What's down this road? Who lives here? The camera in "Friday Night Lights" goes where strangers usually don't go—right up in people's faces. It is the observant outsider who somehow got through the town's gates, and who has an open-minded, openhearted agenda, which is to find out who these people are and what their lives are like.

The radio is usually on as the camera shows us the town, and is often playing while the Panthers' new head coach, Eric Taylor (Kyle Chandler), is driving his car. Taylor can't get away from the pressure and the expectations of his job, even when he's alone; as soon as Monday morning rolls around, the local sports-show gadfly, Slammin' Sammy, starts talking about that week's game and whether Taylor is up to the challenge. Slammin' Sammy's show is a great device: every time we hear him and his call-in listeners blabbing away, we're reminded of how irrational and intense people's love—need, more than love—for the Panthers is, and how the coach's job depends on their fickle support. The players, their families, and their girlfriends are also involved in the drama, and have dramas of their own, all of which were made more complicated by a life-changing, team-changing, and town-changing event in the first episode of the first season. The Panthers' star quarterback, Jason Street (Scott Porter), was paralyzed by an injury in the opening game of that season; he'll be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Overnight, he went from being a young god to being a patient who is encouraged to look on the bright side because he still has the use of his hands.

Almost all of the actors who portray the team members and the other teen-agers are wonderful, even though most of them are too old for their roles. (Porter, the oldest, is twenty-eight.) It's the adults who really stand out on the show, though. Kyle Chandler and Connie Britton, who plays his wife, Tami, have been around for a long time, and though I had every reason to think Chandler would be good in this role, I had no clue that he would be great. And I had never expected any more from Britton than what I saw during the years she played the generic sometime love interest of Michael J. Fox on "Spin City." Individually and as a couple, they are brilliant; there is no better depiction of married life and married love on TV right now. Brad Leland plays Buddy Garrity, whose character is, in a way, the central one of the show, the one who signals to the viewer, "This is what Texas is all about." (Leland is himself from Texas.) Buddy's a local car dealer, a mover and shaker in Dillon, a Panthers maniac and meddler; he shows up at practices and thinks nothing of telling the coach what to do, and he literally gets down on his knees in church and prays for the team to win. The character is an archetype; Leland never lets him sink to the level of stereotype.

As good as it is to have "Friday Night Lights" back, the first episode of the second season may leave you with some worries about the show's direction. The principals don't disappoint, but there's a twist in the episode that is absurdly melodramatic and unbelievable, and will have enormous consequences. The plot thread could easily overwhelm the show and kill it. If that happens and the ratings go up, executives at NBC will think they've scored a touchdown, but fans of the show will know that the network dropped the ball. ♦

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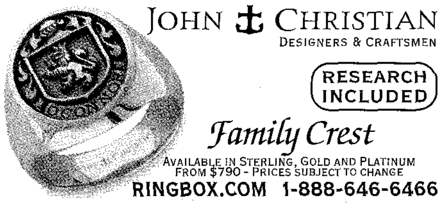
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THE ART WORLD

ALL TOGETHER NOW

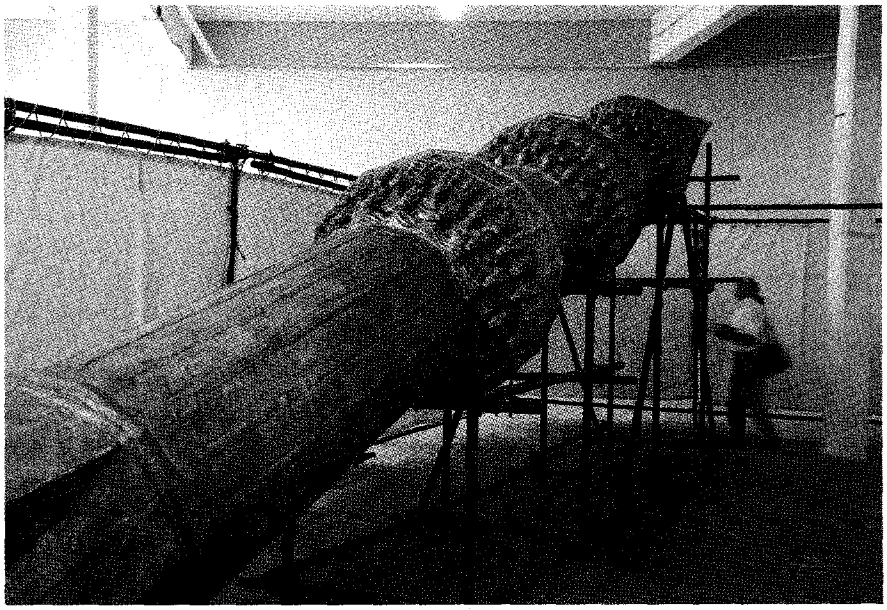
The Istanbul Biennial.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"A huge discharge of energy" is loose in Istanbul, where a grand and abraded past—or a palimpsest of many pasts—gapes at a light-footed future. That is how the Turkish curator Vasif Kortun explained the recent change in his city, which I visited for the opening of the Istanbul Biennial. The city's verve confused me. I had come clutching Orhan Pamuk's great book of light and shadows, the 2003 "Istanbul," in which the Nobel-winning author explains his home town in terms of *hüzün*—Bosporous-style melancholy, the heart-poison of a ruined empire alienated from the East and mortified by the West. Then I learned that in a recent newspaper article Pamuk had confessed, "The new and opulent Istanbul of today is not the melancholy city I knew as a boy." The population was then about a million; it is now at least ten times that.

The Istanbul Biennial, in its tenth edition, is one of the first non-Western biennials, and one of only a few in Muslim countries, out of the scores of contemporary-art festivals that speckle the planet from Santa Fe to Kwangju. Like most biennials of late, it is strenuously fun-filled and earnest, in soft-core, we-are-the-world veins. "Not Only Possible, But Also Necessary: Optimism in the Age of Global War," the Chinese curator Hou Hanru, who is the director of exhibitions at the San Francisco Art Institute, has titled it. Let's everybody cheer up, in other words. More than a hundred artists and artist collectives from three dozen countries mostly play along. About a sixth are Turkish, but, while they are generally in line with going styles, none of them, in a still nascent art world, are major names. (At a concurrent show at Rodeo, an ambitious new gallery in a former tobacco warehouse, I was taken with a work by Ahmet Öğüt, a sly, strong conceptualist with a thing for cars, which featured wall-to-wall asphalt on the building's ground floor. Public stuff in an intimate space, the piece brings a silent redolence of traffic-raddled Istanbul indoors.) Come to that, international art stars from anywhere are conspicuously absent. Hou's ethos is militantly communitarian.

Works appear throughout the city, at sites including the vast Textile Traders' Market (which quite overwhelms the art) and, guerrilla fashion, as video projections in scattered streets that play into the night. On my first tour of Antrepo, the main venue, in a dockside former warehouse, I hated the mélange of, for the most part, noisy, flashing installations and videos. (Typical is a video in which five fellow-citizens of the South Korean artist Gimhongsok sing, in Korean, the national anthems of America, Britain, France, Russia, and Japan; I think it's about imperialism.) The following day, I went next door to the sleek Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, whose permanent collection of Turkish modern painting bespeaks a long, provincial enthrallment to the School of Paris. There I helped myself to a free lunch from a cauldron of rice and chickpeas, installed by the Turkish-born Armenian artist Sarkis, in a display of works from past biennials. Back at Antrepo, I climbed onto a cushioned platform, in a section entitled "Dream House," and, amid lounging couples beneath video screens set in the ceiling, took a nap. Thus refreshed, I went and watched a half-hour projected video, "Rich Cat Dies of Heart Attack in Chicago," by the Spanish artist Fernando Sánchez Castillo. (With Buñuelian drollery, it subjects the big bronze head of a generic dictator to a gamut of bizarre indignities.) My mood turned benign as I got over resenting my marginality, to such events, as an art-loving critic. Why fly ten and a half hours to rain on a parade?



Huang Yong Ping's "Construction Site" (2007), a minaret in cast aluminum.

SERKAN TAYCAN/ISTANBUL BIENNIAL

Echt biennial art is critic-proof, because it eschews formal engagement with past art, providing no basis for comparative evaluation. It is flimsy and ad hoc: here today, gone later today. While often avid for up-to-date technology, it churns academic postminimalist and conceptual aesthetics, continually resetting art's clock to a noontide—the nineteen-sixties, more or less—of nebulously utopian afflatus. Its themes tend to be off-the-shelf topical and its sentiments well worn: war and commerce suck, love and public-spiritedness rock. Hou, in the Istanbul catalogue, fulminates against "neo-liberal economic power" and promotes an ideal of "new and more relevant public spheres to counter the current trend of privatization and gentrification." At this point, biennialism is a networking function of and, it can seem, for publicly funded art administrators and curators, worldwide. Those types were thick on the ground at the show's opening. Dealers and collectors—constituencies of the limousined fairs that dominate the art world in this decade as biennials did in the nineties—were as sparse as objects that seemed plausibly salable. Does it suggest hypocrisy that most of the show's hundred and seventy or so listed sponsors are corporations? (Others are government agencies and private foundations.) It would, if Hou's anti-capitalist posturing were meant to persuade rather than to serve as parochial boilerplate that bothers no one. Nor is his show apt to inflame. I counted just one really provocative (and unusually elegant) work, "Construction Site," by the Chinese artist Huang Yong Ping. The piece is an immense minaret, in cast aluminum, that is propped on a steel framework in the attitude of a Scud-like missile. I'm not sure what it says, but it scared me.

Vasif Kortun, a curator of two past Istanbul Biennials, is currently the director of a public contemporary-art space, Platform, on İstiklal Caddesi, the city's paramount, teeming pedestrian thoroughfare. When I visited him there, he surprised me by saying, "Biennials have consumed their role. Their job is done." That job was to publicize cultures beyond Europe and America. Kortun added, "It has become almost impossible to not know what's going on in the world. We're post-curiosity." He isn't the only doubter in a profession whose current buzzwords—"informality," "the local," "the multitude"—fetishize audience-friendliness. Okwui Enwezor, the Nigerian-born artistic director of Documenta 11, in Kassel, Germany, in 2002, wrote a remarkably mordant essay for the Istanbul catalogue, in which he suggests that contemporary art spaces risk becoming "incubators of amnesia," devoid of historical recall. His model for the right kind of artist is, of all things, a painter, the Belgian Luc Tuymans, whose reflections on such subjects as his country's vile colonialist past are subsumed in a sophisticated and beautiful formal enterprise. Form is how memory works. There is almost no painting (and none by Tuymans) in this biennial. Just one part of the show achieves poetic traction: photographs and videos in the Atatürk Cultural Center, a glass-and-aluminum hulk, from 1969, in a style that might be called East German modernism, whose survival, on the city's main square, is the subject of hot local debate. Many of the works memorialize failed ambitions of the twentieth century, such as forever uncompleted concrete buildings in Soviet Armenia. In the Atatürk Center's solemn, gloomy spaces, they emit a whiff of generalized *hüzün*.

You wouldn't guess from the show, Huang's minaret aside, that it takes place in a country not only Muslim but newly Muslim-ruled. Contemporary art and its shepherds are numb to religion. My touristic visits to remnant Byzantine churches and, especially, to classic mosques dramatized the lacunae for me. The nearly fifteen-hundred-year-old Haghia Sophia, joltingly overlaid with Islamic modifications after the Ottoman Conquest, in 1453, is a sculptural miracle but rather brutal in its grandeur and spiritually extinct. (It has been a museum since 1935.) The best building in Istanbul, and one of the half-dozen greatest I've seen anywhere, is the Süleymaniye mosque, by the sixteenth-century Ottoman architect Sinan. The decisive inventiveness of every interior half-dome, pillar, arch, and bank of windows stuns. Decorative patterns push and pull the space to visceral effect. I stayed to watch prayers. For what it's worth, I sensed a loftiness in the religious sites of Istanbul that may be inimical to radicalism. (Orhan Pamuk has received death threats, but from secular ultranationalists.) Mainly, I was awed by the depth and breadth of my own ignorance of what counts in present history. The experience certainly overshadowed that of the Biennial, though in ways that rendered the shallow, frantic show and its yuppie-ish, wine-swilling social milieu oddly cherishable in their fragility. ♦

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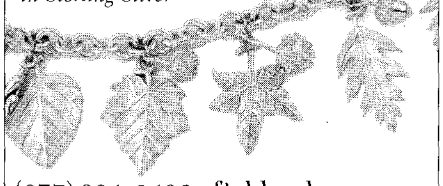

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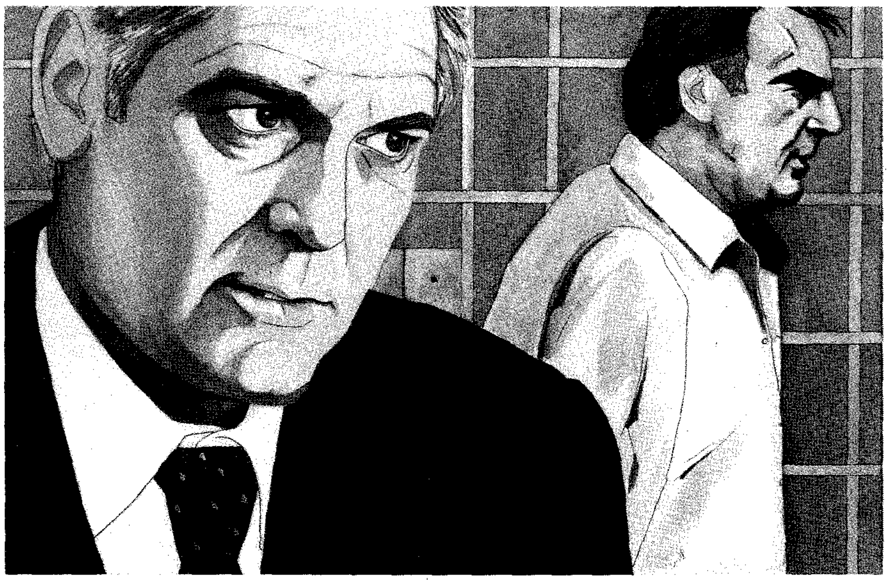
THE CURRENT CINEMA

LOST MEN

"Michael Clayton" and "Into the Wild."

BY DAVID DENBY

It's forever being drummed into us that movies are a visual medium. Screenwriters are chastised with this half-truth all the time; they may be told to keep dialogue terse or suggestive or to drop lines altogether. After the movie is shot, directors may cut good as well as bad dialogue. There are financial reasons, it turns out, to hold back on talk. Most big American movies are made for the international market, and the more "visual" the film, the easier it goes down in Montevideo and Kuala Lumpur. The screenwriter Tony Gilroy was no doubt reined in during his service to the three Bourne movies, in which Matt Damon and the director Paul Greengrass (in the last two films) successfully created a character with a minimum of words and a maximum of action. But Gilroy was also one of two screenwriters credited with Al Pacino's pot-rattling tirades in "The Devil's Advocate," back in 1997; and now, in "Michael Clayton," which Gilroy both wrote and directed, he's back in the flow. With irresistible relish, he pitches us into a high-pressure world of law-firm shenanigans and corruption, and the talk is copious, detailed, and both smart-assed and soulful. The title character, Michael Clayton (George Clooney), is an odd bird at a prestigious New York firm, who hasn't made partner in fifteen years and never will. Michael is the house fixer. He carries cash, deals with the cops and federal agencies, and cleans up messes. He's the white-shoe version of the Harvey Keitel character in "Pulp Fiction."


George Clooney and Tom Wilkinson in a movie by Tony Gilroy.

The movie catches Michael during four frantic days in which the strains in his life are wearing him out. He's a divorced father trying to stay close to his young son; he's in debt to some tough guys after a bar he opened in Manhattan with his alcoholic brother went belly up; his firm is trying to merge with a big London outfit, and it needs to complete work on a case that has been dragging on for years—a three-billion-dollar class-action suit brought against one of its clients, a large chemical company that, the suit charges, knowingly sold a toxic weed-killer. The trouble is that the firm's brilliant but highly medicated litigator, Arthur Edens (Tom Wilkinson), has found a "lost" document that makes the chemical company's culpability clear. In despair, Arthur has stopped taking his pills and flipped out. Like Peter Finch in "Network," he has visions of foulness and disaster and makes apocalyptic pronouncements. Michael is dispatched to contain the madman (who has moments of startling lucidity) before the entire case collapses.

But Michael is a complicated fellow: the disgust that Arthur feels is only an exaggerated version of what he himself feels. As Michael learns what Arthur has found out about the chemical company, he's tracked by high-tech thugs, and the movie turns menacing and dark. Cutting from one place to another and jumping around in time, Gilroy keeps the tension level high. He's aided by Robert Elswit's gleaming cinematography, which turns the enormous law offices into a field of moral ambiguity—the shadows recede into the distance like little pockets of dread. At first, Gilroy overloads the medium: before the picture has got properly under way, he unleashes Wilkinson's hyperventilations on the soundtrack, and the noisy rant squeezes us like a headlock. And Gilroy abruptly and confusingly introduces the various characters, including Karen (Tilda Swinton), the general counsel for the chemical company, who's so isolated, ambitious, and nervous she seems to be having mini-fits of her own. It takes a while to figure out who some of the players are and what, if anything, the big case and the London merger have to do with each other. Yet I'm not actually complaining—it's all fascinating. Gilroy is an entertainer, and he wants to show us everything—dirty secrets held by prestige law firms, the moral squalor of big-time corporate power and what it does to people, the moments of conscience and decency in messed-up lives. He's good with actors, and "Michael Clayton" has pace and drive—it's enormous fun. But I hope that as Gilroy continues directing he will let his movies breathe more. I was grateful for a single uncanny pause, in which Clooney, driving around Westchester on a wild night, stops at dawn, walks up a hill, and silently con-

LARA TOMLIN

fronts three horses, as if they were the only instance of reason in a convulsive world. Gilroy holds the moment, but *only* for a moment.

In the "Ocean's" franchise and earlier movies, Clooney played guys who were on top of everything. He's very intelligent, and it's easy enough for him to point his chin, glare, and tell people off. But in "Syriana" and now in "Michael Clayton" he has done something more interesting: he's playing clever guys who lack the killer instinct, who have some strain of personal honor that holds them back from simply winning. People in and outside Michael's firm keep condescending to him, but he's forty-five years old and broke, and he's not a man who can afford to lose his temper, even if he wanted to. He has to deflect other people's contempt into a strategy of survival. Gilroy has a sardonic, rather than a melodramatic, view of life: Michael will never be an anti-pollution crusader like Julia Roberts's Erin Brockovich or John Travolta's lawyer in "A Civil Action." The fixer is hardly shocked to discover that the world is corrupt; he has just had enough of it. Clooney looks a little worn, and the shagginess becomes him. He gives a beautiful, modulated performance, and he's never been more likable. Nor has he ever had better lines. Gilroy writes confidential, inside-the-law-firm chatter, and nasty poker-table badinage, and also bland corporate-speak. Wilkinson's rant is gaudy, but what Clooney says to his ten-year-old boy is startlingly tough—not many dads are that straight with their sons. Tony Gilroy has produced a screenwriter's film, which assumes that people who move through different worlds will alter their speech without losing their idiosyncratic style. Against all Hollywood wisdom, he trusts the audience to enjoy the texture and the power of words.

Sean Penn's "Into the Wild" is certainly visual—it's entirely too visual, to the point of being cheaply lyrical. Penn can't stop swirling around mountaintops, as if he were selling S.U.V.s, and he pads this hundred-and-forty-minute movie with slow-motion episodes and other cinematographic divertissements. The hyperactive camera style is bizarrely mismatched to the movie's subject, which is one of single-minded asceticism and spiritual purity. Penn has adapted Jon Krakauer's chastely written 1996 book about Christopher Johnson McCandless, an Emory graduate who, at the age of twenty-two, gave away his savings and cut all ties with his family. He tramped around the country and then, determined to live outside any social structure, and without friendship or love, he headed north to the Alaskan wilderness, where he died, alone, in August, 1992. Krakauer defends McCandless against the accusations of arrogance and incompetence levelled by experienced hunters and explorers. The boy, he insists, made mistakes and had bad luck, but he was no different from thousands of other young seekers of the solitary sublime.

Penn, who wrote the screenplay, follows that celebratory line—his hero dies happily, facing the sun. But, to Penn's credit, he doesn't disguise the unconscious cruelty in McCandless's quest. Emile Hirsch, who plays McCandless, is handsome, with an open smile, and he makes the reckless adventurer alert and friendly and attractive to everyone he meets. The movie begins with McCandless saying good-bye to the last person he will ever see and beginning his struggle against starvation in Alaska, and then cuts back to his wanderings, and becomes a kind of journey among forgotten American subcultures. A South Dakota wheat farmer (Vince Vaughn, playing it straight), an aging hippie (Catherine Keener), and a retired Army man living on the edge of the California desert (Hal Holbrook) all grow fond of Chris and ask him to put down his backpack and stay. They are, in effect, offering themselves as surrogate parents, but he always takes off, leaving them bereft—they sense what's happening to him.

It's possible to appreciate the implacability of this boy's revolt without taking it as seriously as Krakauer and Penn do. McCandless rejects not only family and bourgeois life but also sensual life, and he's incapable of sustaining an interest in anyone outside himself. The movie makes it clear that he has been heavily influenced by Tolstoy's later writings, but apparently no one told him that Tolstoy, a Russian aristocrat and a soldier, renounced worldly pleasures only after a tremendous career on horseback, in bed, and at his writing table. Penn re-creates McCandless as a literal-minded saint who lives off the land and produces nothing but his own beatitude. He hasn't experienced enough of life for his rejection of it to carry much weight, and Penn can't see the egocentricity in a revolt that is as naïve as it is grandly self-destructive. ♦

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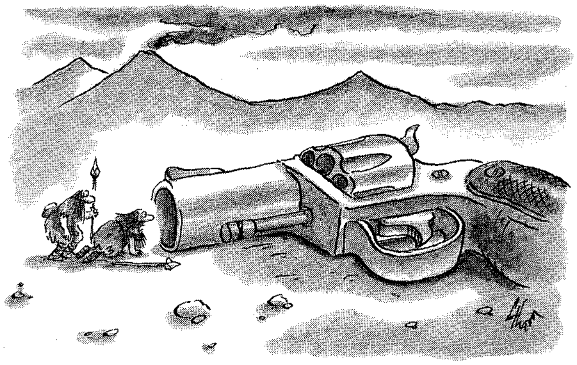
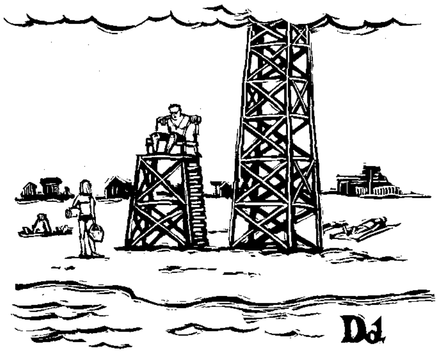
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Gahan Wilson, must be received by Sunday, October 7th. Finalists in the September 24th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 22nd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“We're gonna need a bigger spear.”
Peter Lorber, Thousand Oaks, Calif.



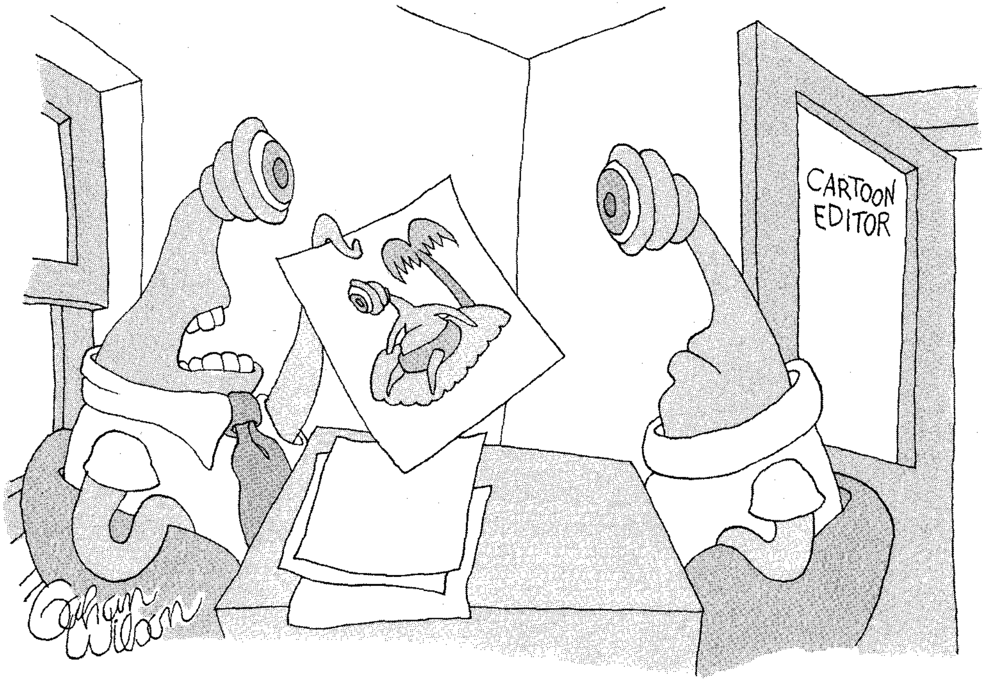
THE FINALISTS

“He's the lifeguard during high tide.”
Jennifer Shelly, New Braunfels, Texas

“God needed a part-time job.”
Genevieve Marshall, Champlain, N.Y.

“The regular lifeguard isn't seeing anybody today.”
Jeffrey White, San Francisco, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

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How do I love thee?

Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
– *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

+5

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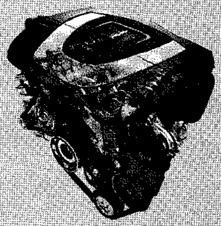
Is 14.4 million miles of road testing excessive?
That depends on what kind of car you're building.

INTRODUCING THE ALL-NEW 2008 C-CLASS.



Why did we drive it the equivalent of 600 times around the world? Why did we force it to endure the snowstorms of Scandinavia, the dust storms of Namibia and every torturous climate in between? And why did we subject the new C-Class to so many miles on the earth's most unforgiving and punishing roads? The answer is simple: because we promised you a Mercedes-Benz.

After seven years of unremitting testing, we bring you the 2008 C-Class. From its very core, with over 70% of the body built with high-strength steel, it is a tribute to our legendary reputation for safety. The braking system, complete with perforated front rotors,* is capable of stopping the car from a speed of 80 mph in just four seconds.** The door hinges can hold the weight of a 200-lb man. The windshield wipers were designed to wash away heavy rain at autobahn speeds. And the suspension was tested for stability at 130 mph, ensuring the utmost in confidence and control.

Inside, the passenger cabin is as scientific as it is beautiful. Seats were not merely built for comfort, but were ergonomically contoured and cushioned to make even the longest journeys relaxing for the body. And the dashboard is the very first in a Mercedes-Benz to meet standards in helping drivers keep their attention on the road.

THE C-CLASS. *Nothing is too excessive when you're building a car like this. Starting at $31,975.****

Unlike any other.

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2008 C300 shown with optional 18" AMG 5-twin-spoke wheels. *Only available in C-Class Sport Sedans. **Skid pad test results. Actual braking distances vary depending on surface, tire conditions and brake maintenance system. ***MSRP for a 2008 C300 includes transp. charge. Excludes all options, taxes, title, regis. and dealer prep. **For more information, call 1-800-FOR-MERCEDES, or visit MBUSA.com.**

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